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MARRIED MAN GRAVES NEW FULFILLMENTS
THE BACK STREETS OF GREENWICH VILLAGE

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The Long Thrill

OLGA ROSMANITH



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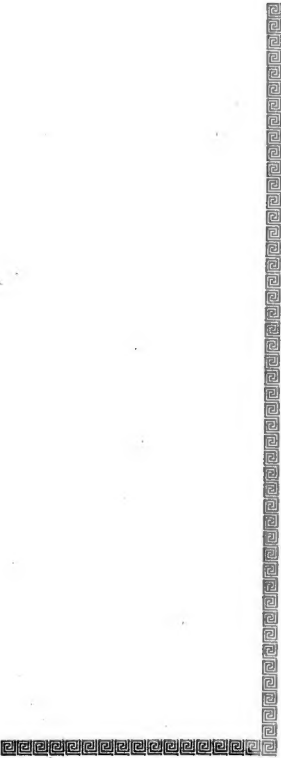
the shocking novel
of a
kept man . . .



THE LONG THRILL

is

A Lion Original



the long thrill

Olga
Rosmanith

A LION BOOK

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FOR the moment, Vern Harrison was the happiest man in New York.

He was sitting at the Steinway which was right-angled to the view window overlooking the East River. Music manuscript paper was on the rack before him.

As he improvised the melody accompanied by the dissonances translated from the hoot of tugs and the life of the river, he stopped now and then to add a phrase or make alterations.

Suddenly his strong, slender hands came down on the keys and reviewed the composition from start to finish.

The door to the music room opened. A thin red-haired woman entered and stood looking at him with an exasperated expression on her frail, but square-jawed, face.

"Vern!" she said. She repeated it louder.

The absorbed musician played on as if he hadn't heard her.

She waited for a pause in the wild spate of sound.

Then she screamed to be sure of attention.

"Why must you play those horrible modern Russian composers?"

The man's handsome face quivered. His eyes closed and his mouth worked. Control wiped out the look of long-suffering hate. Then he turned round on the piano bench.

"That, my dear, is my own composition."

"I might have known. It sounds neurotic. Now will you please be quiet. I need some rest. I've been out all morning shopping and the Fosters are dropping in to-night for canasta."

Vern Harrison had self-will, arrogance and the power of the ruthless in his slender, poetically chiseled face.

He had a cold capacity for hatred—and he hated his wife.

But she was self-satisfied and she did not know it. Nor did he let her guess.

"Sorry I disturbed you," he said with the right touch of irony, no more. "I'll go out. Some research to do at the library."

"Don't be late for dinner. I need you."

"Why? You'll have company. Those putrid bores."

Her flat grey eyes glinted.

"What gives you the right to criticize my friends?"

Bought and paid for, he thought with such venom that his hands clenched and opened.

"Sorry, dear," he said gently. "No hard feelings. They're middle-aged, that's all. For me, that's not congenial."

Enid Harrison was thirteen years older than her husband and she was not the type to bridge the difference. She was an aging spinster and a dozen marriages would not change her.

Vern saw her chagrin and was silent, savoring her misery.

"You undertook some duties, Vern. Kindly remember that."

He had a secret which enabled him to warm suddenly and smooth it over.

"Sure. I'm a bad boy. Spoiled, I guess. Just a little wounded ego. You don't appreciate my composition."

"I just think it's a pity, Vern, I mean you're really talented. Sad, that all you do is turn it into such frightful noises."

Vern managed to smile.

"A matter of taste. Go back to your nap, Enid. No more noise today. I promise you."

He turned on the bench and closed the piano keys. She stood looking disconcerted, then she went out. When the door closed on her, Vern took from his jacket pocket a small limp leather book.

He found the place in the flimsy blue gilt-edged pages.

The left side pages were marked "For" and the right side pages "Against."

On the right side page he added a pencil stroke and the date "14th December."

Handling the costly little book, he smiled and relaxed all over.

It was his armor against hurt, his promise of paradise to come, his retreat, his refuge, his sanctuary, his secret garden.

He knew exactly how many points were recorded in the book.

Both "For" and "Against."

The time was obviously drawing near. The points "Against" were piling up so rapidly.

When the points "Against" numbered a thousand in excess of the points "For," he was going to murder her.

Now they numbered nine hundred and thirty-nine.

Vern Harrison closed the book, but his hands continued to fondle it with the love with which they caressed the keys of the piano.

His face now expressed the inexplicable charm which had made his life easy in spite of his character.

He did not think his life was easy. He thought being

married to Enid was a tough way to earn a living. His mouth went grim and he put the book back in his pocket.

The leather was not black. It was a rich shade of red. The beautiful color of blood.

The butler intercepted him politely on his way out.

"Will you be home to dinner, sir?"

Vern was equally polite.

He felt like pushing the suave old man out of his way, but he needed him on his side. He was going to be chief accomplice to Enid's murder, though he would never know it.

"I expect so. I'll phone if anything detains me."

"Thank you, sir."

"There's a *London Times* on my study table in case you'd like to look at it."

The old man's face relaxed into a smile. "Oh, thank you very much, sir."

Vern allowed himself to be helped on with his costly vicuna overcoat.

The elevator opened directly into the lower floor of the duplex apartment.

Soames pressed the button. The elevator man on duty would be another accomplice to Enid's murder if things worked out the way Vern planned them. Vern could not foresee which man it would be. He was polite to them all. Often at some cost to his nervous system.

Charm was his natural climate, but there were days Enid skinned him raw.

He escaped from the elevator as if he escaped from a trap. The moment he was out in the street he drew long deep gulps of the cold, rain-smelling air.

It reminded him of Pellingham on the Cape and he was flooded with nostalgia.

Thinking of his mother's house there, which Enid now owned, the feeling changed to mental nausea.

He quickened his steps toward Fifth Avenue and turned up his coat collar against the fret of the wind.

Enid's time might come in April if things went on accelerating toward her doom. If so, she might never set foot in that house again.

How wonderful that would be. And how wonderful the change in his life.

Something fluttered in the region of his chest and a nervous sensation sprayed through his body. It wasn't fear. But it wasn't pleasant. A kind of apprehension that things mightn't go as planned.

It all depended on Enid remaining predictable.

He was building everything around the part he knew she would play if she acted according to character.

Hardly aware of it, he turned into Fifth Avenue and walked toward the library at Forty-second Street.

Here for hours at a time he lived with murder and its aftermath. Particularly its aftermath.

For Vern Harrison was not a murderer. He was a young man who was going to commit murder in order to live a free and happy life according to his own terms.

That meant there must never be the slightest suspicion in anyone's mind that Enid's dramatic death was not her own foolish fault, but a subtle way of murder.

He had lived with her for six years. Six winters in New York and six summers at the Cape. He knew every facet of her character and every foible of her personality.

He shuddered, recalling this experience of devastating monotony.

Had it not been that her utter predictability meant freedom for him, it would have driven him mad.

The first raindrops fell heavy on his face as he walked up the steps between the sentinel lions.

The interior was warm, bright and busy.

Vern felt good all over as he entered the great reading room. He took some index drawers to a desk, filled out requests for his books in a fictitious name, then went to the numbered place he had chosen to wait for his research material on poisons and the history and *modus operandi* of the New York medical examiner.

He lost all sense of time and social obligations as he read, fitting the knowledge to his plans and living in the unending delight and anticipation of his project.

He didn't notice the arrival of the girl who took the empty seat beside him.

He lived through the accomplishment of his intent, the fashionable funeral, the reading of the will, the probate and the final acquisition of his legacy.

Now he would restore the house on the Cape to the way he remembered it when he was a small boy and his mother lived. The thought of it without his mother presaged a problem of loneliness. He would never marry again. Not after this revolting experience.

But sex was something else.

A satisfactory sex relationship was one of the first problems to solve when he had the free use of money. And of his time, too.

He had never thought of himself as generous, nor wished to be. But he wished to experience a feeling of power in the ability to give money instead of taking it. He did not wish it strongly enough to be willing to sacrifice his time to the tedium of work, but he anticipated it with pleasure as a result of his daring dream of murder.

He heard a loud, deep sigh beside him.

Startled, as if his thoughts had been overheard, he turned and looked into the warm brown eyes of a girl with a yellow silk scarf round her head.

"Pardon me for interrupting your concentration," she whispered, "but the more I read this the more pixillated I get."

Her smile showed dazzling translucent teeth.

Vern felt a ridiculous impulse to kiss her fresh, youthful mouth.

"Let me help," he whispered back, reaching for the heavy tome that was defeating her.

It was a book on the laws affecting tenants and landlords.

"My stove smoked and ruined the kitchen. He says I'm responsible. But he is. The flue was faulty."

It ended with Vern going home with her to look at the damage.

She was simple, natural and unaffected. He suggested it himself. They discussed it in the big entrance hall of the library and she was a little dubious.

"I wouldn't like you to think—"

"I don't think anything," he said, "except I'd like to help. I'm Harry Vernon. My friends call me Vern. Like to call up somebody and check on me?"

"Oh, no," she said at once, as expected. "I'm Lily Matthews. Commercial artist. Free lance. My apartment is in the Village."

She said it defiantly as if she felt he might think she wasn't good enough for his attention. He was accustomed to this. There was an air he had, of race and authority, that had that effect on people. It had affected Enid. She still took pride in being seen with him.

"Let's go," he said.

Outside it was raining. He left her in the shelter of the great porch while he got a taxi.

Her apartment was off Washington Square.

She asked him to stop by a little Italian grocery near home where she could pick up some food—

"You're invited to share," she said matter-of-factly. "The kitchen walls are smoked but the stove is still working."

He accepted, equally matter-of-factly. But wrapped in his dark thoughts he did not think to share the purchase of the groceries, not even the chianti, and so remained in the taxi unseen by the shopkeeper who joked and laughed with Lily.

He had to step down inside her front door. The apartment was semi-sunk, a kind of half basement.

She had one big studio room, which was studio, living room and bedroom.

It was homelike with floor lamps, salmon-colored

drapes and a wall display of her vivid travel advertising posters.

She took his expensive vicuna overcoat, knowing the material with her fingers.

"I'm not doing very well yet," she said ruefully. "Just enough to get along and keep the landlord panting at my heels."

Vern sat on her studio couch and reached for a cigarette from her coffee table.

"You've got talent and good taste. You'll do all right. How old are you? Or is it a secret?"

"Twenty-four. And you?"

"Thirty-one. And I feel like three hundred."

She shook the rain off his coat and hung it in the passage outside the kitchen. She began to unpack the groceries.

"That's a queer thing to say. What gives you that feeling?"

He was about to make a false answer which would keep the encounter on a shallow level.

But he had a sudden hunger for reality, as a person fed on crusts hungers for meat.

"Ever felt lonely? The kind of loneliness, Lily, you feel among a flock of people? That kind that's so deep down, nobody's able to get at it?"

She stood in the doorway looking at him, forgetting the bottle of salad oil in her hand.

"That's the kind I feel all the time. I didn't know men ever felt it."

He saw tears well in her eyes and glitter in her dark lashes.

He felt something that had been alien to him for a long time, a feeling of compassion for another human being.

His voice was deep with a new note, gentle and unfamiliar.

"How's that, Lily? Don't your people live here?"

"I have no people. Only my father. He's in a sanitarium

for alcoholics some place in South Dakota. He's in and he's out. I worked my way through art school to make something of myself."

She turned into the kitchen to get on with her preparations.

"I shared this place with another girl. She left last month to get married."

"What about the men in your life, Lily?"

"There was a man back home," she said simply. "I didn't care enough. He's married someone else now. I don't get along with these clever New Yorkers."

"What's wrong with us?" He was quickly on the defensive.

"What's wrong with me, you mean? I don't know. Guess I'm not smart enough." She was devastatingly truthful. "I attract them at first, but they're soon through with me." He heard the iron clink of a skillet on the stove. Then a sizzle followed by the savory odor of meatballs crisping in olive oil. "I'm too homespun for my own good. I bore them or something."

Vern relaxed still more.

"Come now, Lily," he said laughing. "Everybody bores somebody. Each to his own, you know."

The dinner under control, she began to set the table. She was smiling now, the tears brushed away.

"It'll be interesting to see my own, when it turns up. I often wonder—"

He watched her moving about.

She was neat and alert in her movements, and he liked her deft, girlish hands. She wore a gold wrist watch on a gold expanding bracelet. Her fingernails were kept short, but well shaped and painted a delicate pink.

She wore a white blouse and a swinging pleated navy skirt that showed a slender but well-built figure. Her hair was tawny, neither brown nor blond, a kind of leopard color. It was tied at the back of her head with a navy ribbon and fell in a cluster of big loose curls.

She was not quite graceful, not quite chic, not quite anything.

She was good material, not tutored in feminine arts, he decided. A somewhat gifted, very determined girl making a living, determined to be something, to lift herself from mediocrity, only to get trapped in another level of it.

He began to feel bored at the very thought of trying to do something about Lily. There was too much spade work.

He was another who would not be coming again.

He went out and looked at the kitchen walls while she was mixing the sauce with the spaghetti.

"You're right, Lily. The landlord is responsible for the condition of that flue."

"Oh, you remembered that. Funny, I'd forgotten it." She looked at him with a sudden flush in her cheeks. "Guess it was the excitement of entertaining you."

The red flowed down her neck, and she turned away from him, aghast at her own remark.

Her excitement communicated.

Now he was aghast at his almost irresistible impulse to kiss her. •

Abruptly he went back into the living room and left her to finish cooking the dinner.

He lit another of her cigarettes.

"I'm not a very exciting character," he said nonchalantly.

Lily brought a wooden bowl of salad to the table.

"But you interest me," she said. "Those were exciting books you were reading."

His stomach dropped, giving him a shocked, sick feeling.

"Any particular one? Or all of them?"

"I only saw one. *Headhunters of the Amazon*. I looked at you and I couldn't figure out the angle. I mean you don't look the type. Not like an explorer or anything."

How naive. He wondered if he were really hearing such conversation.

"What type do I look? If I look anything."

He was making conversation now. He would have got up and left, but the food smelled good and he was hungry.

She took it seriously. Set down the dish of meatballs and spaghetti in their rich dark gravy. Looked at him with her head on one side. Looked him all over.

"Not exactly man-about-town—too much the artist. Maybe a writer. Not quite the artist type—too well dressed. Not a business man—something impractical. Maybe an actor. But a successful actor."

She sat down at the table and he sat where she indicated.

"You guessed right, Lily."

"But I never heard of an actor called Harry Vernon."

She passed him a plate to help himself.

"Thanks. I don't act under that name."

"Then tell me about it."

"I'm in the mood to forget myself tonight. Let's leave that till next time I come."

So there would be a next time. The thought set her blood singing. He could tell by the light in her eyes, the rush of color to her face.

He glanced from her to her posters on the wall. Bold, strong and imaginative. It puzzled him. Nothing naive there. But the determination was there. An odd combination. It might add up to a stubborn fool. A stubborn fool was dangerous. He looked back into her youthful, smiling eyes.

She was childishly happy over his attention to her work. There was nothing dangerous about Lily.

It was still raining when he left. He refused to let her call a taxi. It was a short walk to Washington Square and a driver he picked up wouldn't know where he came from.

He obeyed his impulse to kiss her as they stood inside her front door.

The kiss lasted and lasted.

He felt the yielding limpness in her body as she succumbed to the properties of its immemorial fire.

He succumbed to his own hunger. Why not? She was his for the taking.

He lifted her up, carried her back to the living room and set her down on the studio couch. She sat there doing nothing to help him.

He put an arm round her and began to undo the buttons of her blouse.

When it was halfway open, she stiffened and drew back.

"No—oh, no, what am I doing? I don't know you. I *don't know you.*"

Vern released his hold immediately.

"Do people ever know each other, Lily?"

"They know who~ they are—who each other is. Oh, Vern, don't think I don't like you, but another time when I know you better."

"As you wish." He was gentle, unoffended, exercising the good manners which were so much a part of his charm.

Lily relaxed. "I'm sorry, Vern."

"It's ridiculous to be sorry. What for? It was an insane thought anyway." He glanced at his Rolex wrist watch. "I'm late for an important appointment. I'd forgotten—"

Lily was piqued.

"What's insane about a sudden, irresistible attraction?"

He was conscious again of desire, of a restless, hungry excitement. He looked at her. Her mouth was soft, slightly parted, her eyes humid.

A pulse beat in her bare throat. Between the opening in her blouse he saw the parting of her breasts.

"It isn't love you know, Lily."

"I know. But other things are sweet."

"Even with a stranger?"

She raised her rich, heavy lashes and looked him in the eyes. She saw nothing to frighten her. She smiled faintly. "You are no stranger."

Vern rose, put out the floor lamp and took off his clothes. A street light glimmering through the drapes gave a faint illumination.

Then he undressed Lily, this time with her co-operation.

It was sweet and simple and very satisfying.

Without moving from her, he relaxed and slept briefly.

"It wasn't the first time," he said on waking.

"No, Vern. I told you. There was a man back home. We were married."

"So you're divorced?"

"No. He died. Young men do sometimes."

"Poor kid. No wonder you're lonely."

"Not for that. Being alone is better than a wrong marriage."

"So it wasn't any good?"

"Not in any way. It was escape really. But I didn't know—" She stopped with a small gasp.

"Didn't know what?" Vern insisted.

"It could be like this," she whispered. "With you it's beautiful."

He felt again a surge of excitement and drew her to him in renewed desire.

"But it isn't love, Lily. Make no mistake about it."

"I don't care what it is. Call it anything you like. It's still wonderful."

He laughed softly, feeling very young again feeling princely, too—the royal giver.

"Yes, it's wonderful."

"It's not as if you have to worry," she said. "I'm not possessive."

"I'm not worrying, Lily. I can look out for me."

"You—you wouldn't be married, would you?"

It flayed his nerves like a sour note that destroyed the closing phase of a composition, but his voice was nonchalant.

"I'm a stranger. Remember? Let's leave it that way."

Silently she got off the bed in the gilded dusk and got

herself a wrap. Showed him where he could dress in the little bathroom.

He thought he saw the shine of tears on her cheeks, but there was no sign of them later when again he stood inside her door to bid her good night.

Nor of any chagrin.

She laid her hand on his in a gentle, endearing gesture.

"Come again, stranger. You are welcome."

He was curiously touched.

"Thank you, Lily. I will."

But he had no intention of seeing her again. It was a waste of himself, and Vern Harrison knew his direction. He would waste no part of himself on a dead-end street.

It was after midnight when the elevator door rolled back on the quiet foyer of the East River apartment.

Through the arch he saw Enid at her post of vigilance.

Waiting up for him, she had as usual fallen asleep in the chair before the Adams fireplace. A book she had been reading was lying crumpled, its pages on the floor.

Vern noted her presence with fury and delight.

"Looks like my wife has fallen asleep waiting for me."

The elevator boy looked through the arch.

"She always does that, sir."

"That's right. I tell her to go to bed but she won't listen. What would you do in a case like that?"

"Same as you. Keep on trying. But what can you do with women?"

"So you found that out? Well, good night."

"Good night, sir."

The elevator rolled silkily shut on another nail in Enid Harrison's coffin.

Vern stood looking at his wife for a moment before he tiptoed past her, leaving her to sleep till stiffness or collapse from her chair woke her up.

She was dressed in an expensive dressing robe of a dim blue-grey wool which could do nothing for any woman but keep her warm in a heated apartment.

Her face was pale, her eyes puffed with sleep and her mouth hanging open.

Her head lolled against the back of the antique tapestry chair. The lamplight turned a few strands of her hair to red-gold.

Vern thought impersonally she might have been beautiful once—when she was a very young girl with that red hair flying. But when would Enid do anything that would make her hair lift on the wind of her flight?

She must have been born prim. No one could get that way.

Holding his breath, he tiptoed past her and up the stairs into his bedroom.

For no reason at all but a new habit, he turned the key when he silently closed his door and locked it.

He relaxed on a long breath.

This room alone was home to him in New York. Not the rest of the two-floored apartment, not even the great music room which was supposed to be especially for him.

He glanced with satisfaction at the single bed. No one ever invaded his privacy, although conjugal demands were made on him. The payment for his "easy" life was exacted elsewhere.

He undressed, folding and hanging his clothes with meticulous care. His fastidiousness, his elegance came from the inside out.

Then he showered, rubbed himself down with a rough towel till he glowed, put on heavy white silk pajamas monogrammed in dark blue, switched off the ceiling light he had switched on at the door, and got into bed.

The sheets were cool and fresh. The mattress a delicious combination of give and hardness, just as he liked it. The feather-weight blankets began to warm him with the warmth of his own virile, healthy body.

He stretched luxuriously, feeling the silent flow of sleep weight his limbs.

He hadn't felt so relaxed in months. Thanks to the encounter with Lily Matthews.

Living it through again, he savored mentally the keen physical enjoyment.

Strange how little of that he had had in comparison with the usual experience of men of his age and personality.

He had thought a double life, at least in the case of his sex life, would have been a simple matter to arrange when he married Enid. Otherwise, he wouldn't have married her.

Or would he?

Knowing what he knew now, would he have walked into his particular and personal jail?

He got the old familiar flutter in his chest that spread to his stomach and gave him nausea. It was faint now, hardly more than a thought, but his nervous system reacted. He grew tense all over.

Here comes the old enemy, he thought, insomnia.

At that he woke up.

If only Lily were here now. Hell, how did I get this way?

He went through the everlasting treadmill again, leading inevitably to his father.

His father was not only the origin of his life. He was the origin of all his troubles.

A fool who understood nothing fine and was consequently resentful and envious of the superiority of his son. There could be no other explanation for his inhuman conduct.

Now lying on his back, watching the lights and shadows on the ceiling, Vern returned inevitably to the halcyon days with his grandmother.

Her father, his great-grandfather, had been a clipper captain and she had been to sea with him. Left motherless and frail, she had been exposed to hardship and danger, and so regained her health.

Vern recalled her as an old woman, sturdy as a great oak, hearty as an old sea captain herself and the tenderest of all women.

She was his maternal grandmother. She had little use

for his father, a successful business man dealing in office stationery wholesale, but Vernon was the image of his mother. His father was alarmed and then disgusted by his preoccupation with the piano. It was outside his experience. He thought of artists of any type as a race apart and resented that the vagaries of human genes had dropped one in his family.

The fact that his mother could not have another child aggravated the enmity. Vernon was the only child, and he was odd, inexplicable, talented in an undesirable way and therefore useless and even objectionable.

They lived in Boston and he went to school there.

His mother, a semi-invalid for her brief eleven years of married life after his birth, was only too happy to let him spend the long summers at Pellingham on the Cape with his grandmother.

Turning now restlessly in his bed, Vern was translated to his room there.

Beside the window through which he could see the stars tangled in the branches of the old elm, there were three portholes.

The whole of the house, indeed, had been made as much like a ship as possible.

There was an observation deck on the roof where he had even been allowed to sleep under the stars on hot nights.

The dining room was furnished with teak from an old sailing ship and lit with swinging lamps picked up at a ship's chandlers.

The breath of the sea and the sound of the sea were always in the house.

That house meant home.

Now he rolled over on his stomach and stretched his arms like a man on a cross.

He slurred the following years. They were too painful. His mother died a week after his grandmother.

That week made quite a difference. His mother in-

herited the Pellingham house and from her it passed into the hands of his father.

Vern groaned into the pillow.

His father was almost as prejudiced against men who followed the sea as he was against the freakish creatures who became musicians.

His mind was a miniature office.

He neglected Vern as a father, but thought of him constantly as responsible for his welfare. He employed housekeepers to see that he was fed and clothed and did his homework. He vetoed all forms of musical education.

When the time came he offered Vern a college course in business administration.

Vern ran away to sea.

He did not have the stamina to become a good deck officer in the merchant marine. His health was too uncertain; a nervous weakness of his stomach let him down, and he hated the discipline.

He got around the world several times on cargo boats and tramps plying from hither to yon.

Now and then he stayed for months in foreign ports playing pianos in night clubs and getting along.

His father died when he was twenty-four.

Vern never understood his father, so could never guess whether it was because of duty or remorse or a guilty conscience that he left him all his money.

Owing to the medical expenses of a three-year illness, what was left was very little in comparison with what might be expected from the competent business dedication of such a man.

After all debts, funeral expenses and death duties were paid, Vern inherited almost twenty-three thousand dollars.

In a New York bank he had accumulated two thousand odd of his own.

Without even thinking he wrote a Pellingham real-estate office and told them to offer ten thousand dollars for the old house his father had sold for seven.

News came back that the present owner called the bid "insulting and ridiculous."

Vern wired the agents to offer fifteen thousand.

The answer was intended to discourage him for all time.

The owner said the house would never be available at any sum. She didn't need money. But she liked the house as a summer resort. It was quaint and different and she meant to keep it as long as she lived.

Vern shelved the idea.

He took an apartment on the East Side, bought a used Hamlin and Mason grand piano, found a fine teacher and in hours of intensive study sated the hunger of years.

But when the heat of the summer came in the shimmering streets of New York, he longed for the sea. The sea without labor, the sea without discipline.

There was an inn at Pellingham if the place hadn't changed.

It hadn't.

Neither had Captain Piers gone away. He met the old man in the main street and recognized him immediately.

The old salt took a little convincing that Vern was the young man he'd known as a child. Suddenly it got through. Vern was invited to stay at the old salt-box house on the edge of the dunes. He accepted.

In a day or two he was oriented, and the deep-buried longing was out again. To wander through the house where he had been happy with his grandmother.

Dressing with the care he would have taken for a presidential reception, he called formally on the owner.

That was how he met Enid.

He was invited to tea in the drawing room where his grandmother had dispensed it. Enid had made little change. She had bought the property with all its contents, and even valued as an antique his grandmother's inlaid, satin-lined workbox.

Two things became apparent to Vern Harrison at that first meeting.

One, he would never be satisfied till he owned the house he regarded as rightfully his own. Two, there was an easy way to attain it—with the priceless boon of elegant living without working for it.

Enid Moorfield was single. She was rich. She was susceptible to charm and good manners. She was emotionally stirred by him.

The idea of marrying her struck Vern almost at once, but while his mind was impressed, something in him was hostile to it.

He walked the moon-marbled beach at midnight thinking about it, growing accustomed to the alien idea. His money was dwindling fast.

Looking the future in the face he saw the lean well-known features of "no work—no pay."

That something in him that provided hunches was even more hostile to this apparition.

He spent the summer at Pellingham paying careful court to the strangely spinsterish Miss Moorfield, for while he knew with a sixth sense that she was "caught," she did not know it, or did not want to acknowledge it.

She was afraid of his good looks and easy charm.

She was afraid they would mean trouble for her. He was a younger man, too. She liked things to be formal, predictable, settled, safe. She didn't want to undertake a watch-dog marriage.

It took Vern quite a time and some consummate acting he fiercely resented before he got her so emotionally stirred she could not refuse him.

They were married in New York that fall.

Vern groaned again remembering how he had almost run away that day. Only his reduced bank balance held him down.

From then on he had been dominated, harassed, heckled and possessed.

He threw himself over on his back. The shadowy ceiling depressed him. He turned on the bedside lamp and reached for cigarettes.

His hand came in contact with a card propped up against the lamp. It was one of Enid's gilt-edged blue correspondence cards which read:

Dear, if I'm asleep when you come in, wake me up. If I've gone to bed, come in to me, no matter how late. I've a surprise that can't wait. E. P.S. I'll be nice to you.

What a surprise he had for her if she knew where he'd been.

He read the P.S. three times unable to believe his eyesight. This from Enid. It was horrible.

He thought of her thin, arid body. The clammy skin over the prominent bones. He shuddered. He sat up in bed feeling nauseated.

The implication was clear enough. If he didn't act like a husband there would be difficulty about his bills at the beginning of the month. She would show him where the balance of power lay.

All that money and she couldn't even release him from embarrassment by making a lump settlement.

Suddenly he went hot all over as if he smoked with hatred.

He threw the covers back and jumped out of bed.

There was something he had to do which would help him to sleep.

He made a row of ten strokes in his little crimson leather book.

Vern woke to the foghorns of a cold morning. His room was under the music room and had the same view of the East River.

He got up, shut the window and looked out.

Strange how fog depressed him in New York, while in Pellingham he was inspired by the thick, white silence, the sense of the mystery of the hidden sea.

He got his robe and rang for coffee. Why was he so

obsessed with Pellingham? It was as cold as hell up there in the winter.

The tray was brought by the maid, Nora. She said impersonally, "Madame wishes to see you as soon as possible, sir. You will find her in the library."

"Thank you, Nora."

The girl was young, smart and well-trained. She never looked at him when she spoke. He could find no fault with her manners, but she made him feel as negligible an asset to the household as if he were a piece of the furniture.

The staff knew nothing of their employers' private affairs, but he feared they guessed the situation.

Vern sat on the bed drinking his hot black coffee.

He could see into the girl's mind—even hear her say—"He must have married her for the money. Why else would he stand for her?"

Horrible unease came back. It was his almost constant company.

Wasn't it enough to be bored, disgusted, restricted, frustrated, without looking a fool to the domestic staff in the bitter bargain?

What did Enid want with him at this time in the morning? A lecture about staying out last night no doubt.

He showered and shaved and dressed deliberately and slowly.

He found Enid sitting at the big table desk going through accounts.

She was dressed in a navy-blue shantung two-piece suit accented with white. She was wearing her big horn-rimmed glasses and she looked like a distinguished business executive.

Vern sat down in a soft hide reading-chair and draped a leg over its arm.

He looked nonchalant and relaxed. Inwardly he was bracing himself.

"What seems to be the trouble, Enid?"

She looked at him over her glasses as if she hadn't

heard him enter. Her red hair looked dim against the bright binding of the books, but there was a warmth of color in her thin cheeks.

"No trouble. Why should there be? I have a surprise for you."

"I hope it's pleasant."

"Why not? It's nearly Christmas."

Her bank pass books were on the desk and her big check book. Vern's pulses quickened. Maybe she'd got the idea it was only civilized to share her power with her consort, instead of doling out alms to him.

"Then tell me. I'm no good at guessing."

But she was smiling, trying to be playful as a damn kitten.

"Try once. It's something you want a great deal."

He thought venomously how good it would be when the time came to kill her. The thought had become normal. This morning it became exhilarating.

His smile was spontaneous. He could afford to play games with her; it was for such a short while longer.

"A beautiful foreign sports car?"

She looked rueful.

"You guessed right. Though it isn't exactly a sports car." She ran on, sensing his state of shock. "It isn't exactly a sports car. You see, you'll need it to take me about places. But it's the most beautiful car in the world, ordered six months ago. It arrived yesterday."

He managed to act the part of the delighted object of benevolence to her satisfaction.

She called up the garage and ordered them to bring the car to the door.

They went down together and out into the street in the cold, clinging December fog.

"It's a Silver Wraith," Enid said with legitimate pride. "A dream to drive, so the man tells me."

Vern looked at the great gleaming car with some awe and considerable horror. It was black and it was a Rolls

Royce limousine. He thought how magnificent it would look, taking him, chauffeur driven, to Enid's funeral.

Which was exactly what he would do with it before he parted with it. He promised himself.

"I'm speechless, Enid."

This satisfied her.

"I knew you'd be overcome. After all, it would be so obvious to buy you a Jaguar."

But so right, you fool woman, he thought, since you must butt in where your help is not wanted.

"I don't know how to thank you."

"Oh, yes, you do. Be a good boy, Vern. You have everything you want. You could be more considerate from now on."

He winced.

"I'm not exactly a boy."

"Well, you act like one. Staying out without leaving word. Oh, don't think I suspect you of other women. It's just that it's considerate to let me know where you are."

He could not trust himself to answer this.

"Who has the keys?"

He glanced at the man from the garage who was hanging back. Enid beckoned him. She took the keys which were on a solid gold chain with a heavy gold Christopher medal engraved V.H. and put them in Vern's hand.

"Let's drop him at the garage and go for a short drive."

"What? In this fog? Why everything's stopped. You can't see across the street."

"You could go carefully round the block."

It seemed irrational even to himself, but he could not bring himself to get into the magnificent car, start the engine and officially accept it, a preposterous toy in lieu of the human consideration she hadn't the imagination to give although she exacted it from others.

"I wouldn't risk it in the fog. Sorry, Enid, its magnificence intimidates me. Let's wait for the right occasion."

"He's right, ma'm," the man from the garage said unexpectedly.

Vern returned the keys to him.

"Look inside, Vern, I had it upholstered in your favorite color."

What did she know of his taste in color? Vern looked inside. The seats were covered in soft dark-red leather of sumptuous and superlative quality.

"Like your wallet and your little notebook."

Vern experienced a strange thrill like the twist of some psychic lightning.

"A stroke of genius," he said sincerely. "I appreciate it."

She linked her arm in his to go in out of the cold wind. As far as her tart nature would allow her to be happy, his words had made her happy.

She sat with him while Soames served his breakfast at the dining table.

He ate without enthusiasm solely to keep his strength.

Enid commented on his lack of appetite and how it had troubled her lately.

"I hope, Vern, you remembered to eat while you were out last night."

"I did."

He volunteered no false information for which she was avidly fishing.

The thought was born that he had enjoyed the dinner Lily had cooked for him as much as any meal he could recall in his life.

"Some place near the library, no doubt?"

"Fairly near. Fairly good. You remind me I have to go back there this morning."

"To the restaurant?"

"To the library." Another alibi for retreat and absence had arrived full-fledged.

"Excuse me now. I've some phrases for my composition I want to put down before they get lost."

"It's so quiet with the fog," Enid complained. "Don't shatter the place with those dreadful dissonances."

Nothing would ease him more than to do just that.

"I should get a practice room somewhere, Enid. They have them in Carnegie Hall."

She was alert at once. Hours of absence, she knew not whither, would never do.

"It would be simpler to get the room sound-proofed."

Irony escaped him. He could no longer help it.

"That would be a surprise that would be truly appreciated."

He left the dining room purposefully and Enid followed him. He went to the music room, sat on the bench and opened the lid of the keyboard.

"I don't believe you're as thrilled with that Rolls as you pretended to be."

Vern's patience almost died of exhaustion.

"I don't know what more I can say, Enid. I was overwhelmed. It's a royal gift. It's—it's simply unbelievable."

She leaned in the waist of the piano looking straight into the opaque darkness of his eyes.

"Vern, tell the truth for once. What do you really think?"

He looked at her without speaking. What I really think, he thought, would slay you. I think you're a fool. I think you're a selfish, unattractive, in fact, repulsive bitch. I think if you don't know a man wants to think for himself and choose for himself and go into a show-room and get in and out of a few models and make his own deal and write his own check, you're not even sufficiently educated to share the same house with an adult man.

A surge of courage like a shot in the arm stiffened him by the thought that this time next year she would be moldering six feet underground.

He smiled at her, lighting his dark slender face with its irresistible charm.

"Just a moment while I make a note before a thought escapes me."

Enjoying the appalling humor of allowing her to be witness to the act, he took the red leather book from his pocket and with its little gold pencil made a thick, black stroke.

He put it back, his fingers caressing it.

She asked no questions. She was too intent on hearing the words she longed to hear, to find among them some indication that Vern's heart was truly touched, that she was not alone in her emotional slavery.

Vern drew on all the compliments he'd ever heard or read about the gentleness and generosity of women. Finally she gave up. Or was satisfied.

His hands came down on the piano filling the room with crashing thunder as she left. She turned back, her face twisted with startled anger.

"Vern!"

He heard only his own mad cacophony.

Her hand came down sharply on his shoulder. He jumped, startled, and a wild beast peered for an instant from his face. Then he turned to her.

"Enid!"

"What is the matter with you, Vern? You sound like you had a storm inside you."

"It's your undeveloped taste. You know nothing of the strength and power of modern music."

"I know a lot, but I don't like it."

Six feet underground! What would it matter to her then? Sighing, he rose from the piano bench, glanced at the swirling white banners that fogged the windows.

"Too bad. I'll have to go out. And that's too bad also. In this weather."

"Don't go. Sit with me while I work."

"I'm not in the mood to stay home and do nothing."

"You're not doing nothing when you keep me company."

"What am I doing?"

She grew red, her lips tightened and her voice was shrewish.

"You're being considerate. Or learning to be considerate. After all, all I ask is a little kindness."

Only a few more strokes in the little red book and doom would claim her.

"Very well," he said gently, "I'll find a book I like and come and sit with you."

He sat in the big soft reading-chair. He smoked. He was warm and comfortable and it was a very good book. But he churned inside. Not because he was young and vital and had some impelling activity waiting for him in the world outside the fog-bound room.

But because he was a prisoner. To unbearable suspense.

In half an hour he was on his feet, his mind on his midriff. There was the terrible flutter at his solar plexus which played havoc with his stomach.

She looked up.

"What's the matter, darling? You look so white."

"This ghastly stomach trouble again."

She put down her fountain pen, closed her books, slid them in the desk drawer and locked it. Vern watched her put the key in her jacket pocket with vicious hate. She would conceal her affairs from him if he were dying.

"I'm going to call the doctor."

"No—no—no—"

"Why not? I have all the money in the world. You can have everything you need to get you well. Your resistance to professional help doesn't make sense."

He went on resisting. "It's just that the doctor doesn't understand me."

"Yes, he does. I explained to him."

"You? But what do you know?"

"I know you're frightened. You don't know it, but I do. This is a hangover from your father."

"This is the end," said Vern, showing his fury.

He ran from the library into his room, collected his hat and overcoat. Spurning the long wait for the elevator,

he went through the service door, pulling on his coat as he galloped down the stairs.

He had no idea where he was going to spend the day. Liberty was all he wanted.

He was glad of the fog that would hide him ten steps away from the apartment house.

The uniformed and bemedaled commissionaire pulled open the front door with a stately gesture.

Vern ignored him and walked out.

He walked across Lexington and across Madison before he realized he didn't know where he was going.

He had places to go to. Three clubs for instance, with warm lounges, the latest newspapers and magazines, obsequious service, and, even at this early hour, a dozen possibilities of social encounters.

Enid's social circle. Friends of her friends. People who were polite to him for her sake, and undoubtedly sneered behind his back at his humiliating situation.

He felt worse than undressed when they hailed him and tolerated him. He felt skinned alive.

It would be different when she was dead and he had control of his hard-earned money. He would get away from the possibility of meeting anyone who had ever known her. Except, of course, at Pellingham where his family had been important on the Cape.

He would settle somewhere in South America, maybe, where he would be a prince with that money. It cheered him now to recall how well he knew his way about the world.

Automatically he turned to the right on reaching the fog-silent white wilderness of Fifth Avenue. Lights glowed dimly like small gold stars.

He was gravitating toward what had become, if not his home, his alma mater, since he had entered its university of self-won knowledge—the library.

Fog or no fog, it was on the job. It was warm and light, and the competent, quiet staff were all at their

stations to assist him in his study of murder without punishment.

He relaxed in the calm atmosphere of the index room.

Nobody was going to heckle him or ridicule him, no matter what book he took out. He chose some books on writing, a book called *Twelve Against Crime*, being a true account of twelve individuals who made a science of some aspect of detecting murder, and some detailed reports of classic murder cases.

As usual he scorned fiction. Truth alone would be of any service to him.

The flutter in his chest disturbed him while he sat at the place he had chosen in the great reading room, waiting for the books to be delivered to him.

A fugitive pain flicked round his ribs like the touch of a hot wire.

Hell, he said to himself, this is familiar.

It was a nervous stomach trouble he had had ever since he could remember. Whenever life got out of hand and people could not be dominated—or even placated—he became ill with it.

It followed an arbitrary course.

It started with a discomfort in his chest which was accompanied by an agonizing feeling of nameless anxiety.

Then came the pain, the restlessness and a feeling of terror. . .

He would be hungry and unable to eat. He would grow weak and faint and force some food down his throat.

This would be thrown up and he would go on throwing up till he ached with its agony and exhaustion.

It had interfered with his schooling as a child.

His father had blamed it on his grandmother's lax discipline during his summers with her at the Cape. His grandmother had blamed it on his father's rejection of him, or his paternal heredity.

He did not notice when the books were put before him. After a while he opened one but did not read it. He

was gazing through the printed page at the great green rollers that would be crashing along Pellingham beach with their mighty winter roar.

Captain Piers would be snug in his little house by a red coal fire. He knew how to deal with these attacks. From the first time Vern had had one in his house at eight years old, the old man had tucked him up in bed with a hot water bottle at his feet, a hot water bag on his stomach and a drink made of hot water, lemon juice and brandy.

Vern would fall asleep at once and wake up cured.

Where could he go to get a drink like that? And see the comforting flames? And feel the solace of a hand that wielded hot water bags and hot blankets?

Vern raised his eyes and looked round the reading room.

Most of the readers were men. Some were old, some were students, some obviously homeless in some way, some might be homeless in the same sense as himself.

He wondered what went on with other rich wives and their penniless husbands.

He had between seven and eight dollars in his wallet. And he would have no more till he went and asked her for some.

She would then give him exactly what he asked for, whether it was fifty, five hundred or a thousand. No less and no more.

He had never been able to figure it out, whether it was a game, a method of keeping him alive to his dependency, or a play for gratitude.

She had forced the first request on him by ignoring his predicament, although she was aware of it.

"I'm grateful for the charge accounts and the presents," he had said to her, "but I need some cash. A man must carry it."

"Of course, Vern. How much?"

"I leave that to your discretion."

"But Vern, I don't want to do your thinking for you. You tell me what you need. I'll give it to you."

That was how it had stood ever since.

Vern had thought of getting free by going to work.

But it could never be the answer.

He was not trained nor equipped to earn money by the kind of work he liked to do. Work that had no office hours, no restrictions, no discipline except self-imposed, no outside authority. No demands made on him, no standard to meet.

He rose and left the books. He knew what to do to alleviate his present misery.

Outside he walked down shrouded Forty-second Street to Lexington, turned left and found his way to a jeweler's he had noted bearing the insignia of the pawn shop.

Without a word he unfastened the basket-woven gold strap of his watch and pushed it across the counter.

The old man gave him two hundred and seventy dollars.

He felt good when he emerged into the clammy cold of the street. Like a man of substance. Not like the reluctant gigolo of a millionairess.

He went into a bar and grill, sat in a booth and ate filet mignon with green salad. It gave him warmth and strength. He took a long time over his coffee and cigarettes.

He spent the afternoon in a movie, sitting twice through a murder drama which, though fiction, had clever points.

When he came out it was raining and the fog washed away.

He went down the steps of a subway station and took the train for downtown. He hadn't thought it out, but he knew where he was going. He took a taxi to the corner of Lily's street in the Village and walked the rest of the way.

She was home.

She opened the door to him, looking strangely different.

She was wearing a yellow peasant blouse and a red velvet quilted skirt. A yellow plastic apron was tied over it.

Her tawny hair was piled on the top of her head. Her hands were dirty and she had a smudge across the bridge of her nose.

Her eyes went wide and color flowed into her cheeks. It was obvious she was amazed to see him.

"Why, Vern! I never expected to see you again in this life!"

He stepped inside and shut the door.

"I said I would come back."

"But I didn't believe you."

"Why not? Do I seem like a man who would tell a lie?"

"You don't seem like anything. I mean I don't know what you seem like. I don't know anyone like you. Oh, Vern, don't ask me. I'm dazed. This is my lucky day—"

"Because I came back?"

"No. I mean yes—that, too. But something happened. Come on in. I'll tell you."

She took his damp coat, shook it out and hung it in the kitchen passage. He went into her warm living room. It was in wild disorder, the floor littered with grocery cartons beginning to fill with painting materials and books.

"Well, what on earth—oh, the landlord gave you notice!"

Lily pealed with laughter. The happiest sound Vern had heard in years.

"In a way—yes. You see, Vern. I got a contract this morning. I can pay a little more rent because it's certain. So I'm moving across the street to a better flat. The landlord is pleased because he wants to do this place over."

She paused and her brow creased. "But oh dear, if I'd guessed you were coming—I'm so sorry I'm in such a mess—no peace or anything."

Vern pushed a lampshade aside and sat on the studio couch.

She was pleased to see him. She wasn't scolding him or finding fault with him or asking where he'd been.

"It's peaceful enough, Lily. When are you moving? Tonight?"

"Oh, no. Tomorrow. It won't be much really. But I've got to pack. Have you eaten lately?"

"Not very. But I'm not in the mood. I'd like some coffee. How about you?"

"Well, I'm hungry. And there's nothing in the house."

With a feeling of pure happiness, Vern took out his wallet and gave her a twenty-dollar bill.

"Get all you need and also a bottle of Martell's Three Star Brandy."

Lily took the note with the naturalness of a girl who expects a man to pay his own way.

"I can get a sirloin steak. What a celebration!"

She took off her apron and put on a red corduroy rain coat with a hood over her hair. "You do like steak, don't you, Vern?"

"As well as anything. But I told you I wasn't in the mood."

"You will be later." She poured a cup of coffee from the percolator on the stove and set it before him. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

The door shut and he was alone in her little apartment.

It was Vern's nature to abhor disorder so much that an untidy room could set up internal reactions.

He was amazed that in spite of it he felt curiously at peace. Or was it curiously at home? Or had disgust and weariness robbed him of discrimination?

Lily was back before he had answered his own question.

She set the packages in the kitchen, then came in and gave him change. He took it as naturally as she had taken the note to do the shopping.

It was absurd, but it was as if some long-tried understanding existed between them. The peace in him grew deeper.

She looked round at the havoc she had made in the room.

"Guess I could clear it up a little just for tonight."

"Don't be foolish, Lily. Let's eat. Then I'll help you with your packing."

She stared at him aghast. "You'll help me with my packing?"

Every word was underlined with heart felt astonishment.

"What's abnormal about that? Haven't you heard of a man helping a woman?"

"Yes. But not this. And not you."

"Why not me? What is it you feel about me that makes it strange? Answer me, Lily. Answer me."

But she wouldn't answer him. Or she couldn't.

"There's something about you I can't explain. Not like other men. I don't know. I just don't know."

He guessed she felt that superiority which irritated some people and fascinated others. His peace was shaken. Did she feel in him some streak of cruelty, some human lack of caring for the needs of others?

He ate with her so that she would enjoy her splendid dinner, but he wasn't hungry.

The flutter began again. He found a liqueur glass and drank a little brandy.

He took off his jacket, sat on the floor and packed the grocery cartons with paints and books as she handed them to him. The books were mostly technical books on commercial art. There were some Book of the Month Club books and an illustrated Bible. There was a book on freighter travel.

"Some day I'm going round the world," said Lily. "On a couple of shoestrings. That tells you how. I'm saving for it."

"Good for you. I can tell you something about it."

He told her how he'd run away from home and how easy it had been for him to ship on a coastline freighter and from that get out to sea.

She was shaking her head as she listened.

"That's so unlike you somehow. That doesn't seem like you at all. The dirty work. Men yelling at you."

"You seem to know me rather well," he said drily. "That's all for now."

Lily didn't argue. She passed more books. Soon they were all packed and tied up. Then she wrapped china in newsprint while he stowed it fast and carefully.

By eleven o'clock it was all done.

"It feels late," she said. "Must be midnight."

Vern glanced at his wrist watch. It wasn't there.

His chest fluttered. This again, and it was time to go home. He couldn't keep Lily up. She was a working girl with a big day tomorrow.

He got up and reached for his jacket. The pain struck him in the middle. He sat down abruptly and asked Lily to get the brandy.

She sat beside him on the studio couch, took his hands in hers, looked at him with true concern in her kind little face.

"Tell me, Vern. You're ill. What is it? What's the matter?"

He told her. He told her how Captain Piers used to fix him. Lily had everything. The warm bed, the hot water bag, the lemon and the brandy.

She took the cover off the studio couch this time and made it up. He got in while she was in the kitchen. She fetched the hot water bag for his stomach. She supported him against her shoulder while he took the hot, burning drink.

She took the glass from him. He settled down feeling the liquor steal warmly through his veins with a heavy tingling peace.

He was drawn back from the rim of sleep by feeling Lily get into bed beside him. He felt her soft warmth through the silken veil of a nightgown. She slipped her arm under his neck and put the other arm over his

shoulders. She drew the cover up so that he was protected from the draft.

She lay without stirring.

The pain deadened and died. The flutter was still. Vaguely he thought he felt on his cheek the gentle touch of her lips. He slept.

When he woke, high daylight filtered through the salmon-colored drapes. Vern was alone in the bed. He was in fact alone in the apartment.

He felt wonderful. Relaxed, renewed and strong. He hadn't slept like that in months.

He sat up. He saw a card propped up on the coffee table.

Dear Vern, it's nine, I've got to leave and I haven't the heart to wake you up. I'll be back at four to do my moving.

So you'll be sure to have it with you, I've written my new address in your little red book.

Take care of yourself. Lily.

A sensation of cold shock as violent as the onrush of a towering wave engulfed him and almost stopped his heart.

He jumped up and reached for the sinister little book in his jacket pocket.

Baffled, no doubt, by the pages of meaningless strokes headed "For" and "Against," she had turned to the other end of the book.

There he saw in her gay, flowing handwriting: Lily Matthews, 31 Colton, Village.

"God forbid!" he shouted to the empty premises.

He tore out the little page, flicked the light on his cigarette lighter and set fire to it.

It was noon when he arrived home at the East River apartment.

Soames was serving an early lunch to Enid in the dining room as Vern entered.

"Vern," she called, "is that you? Come in and see me." He left his hat and overcoat in the foyer and went and sat by her in the dining room.

She gave him a bright smile, but her eyes were dangerous.

The act was for Soames. He mustn't know Vern had been off the leash for the night. Vern was glad to fall in with it.

"Hope you had a good time," she said, "at your party."

"Wonderful. And for once I slept well."

"That's good. Though you don't look rested. The Fosters are coming tonight." The hard look she gave him was to tell him he'd better be there. "Dinner at seven. They're coming and bringing a guest with them."

"I'll be there," said Vern. He got up to go to his room. Enid rose and followed him.

She followed him into the sanctuary of his room and shut the door behind her.

Vern braced himself.

"I can't change your wild, ungrateful nature," she said quietly, "but I'm a proud woman. If you disgrace me, Vern Harrison, you'll suffer for it."

"How could I disgrace you? Haven't you always said I have perfect manners?"

She looked plain and old in her impotent anger.

"Don't make it worse by insulting my intelligence. You know what I mean. If you make a fool of me running around with other women."

"Have you ever known me to do that?"

"Not yet. But that doesn't mean you don't do it." She wrung her hands together in impotence and frustration. "Vern, Vern, be good to me, be nice to me."

He moved a step back from her in disgust.

"I am nice to you. I do my best to be what you want, to do everything you want me to—even to living in your home acting the part of prince consort, while I'm actually the penniless retainer."

She went white, then darkly red.

"How much do you want? You haven't asked recently. Otherwise you would have had plenty. Have I ever refused you?"

"I don't want anything. Except perhaps a little peace."

"And all I want is a little kindness. A fair exchange, don't you think?"

"What do you mean, kindness? How could I be any kinder to you?"

"My God, Vern! How do I stand you? One thing could be left to your imagination if you had any. Another is, don't stay out again at night."

He said nothing.

She made an exasperated gesture with her hands. "Where were you? Please tell me."

"Nowhere that matters to you. I felt ill. I needed peace to get over it. If I'd come home you'd have got the doctor. I get better fastest with a bottle of brandy and a solitary hotel room."

"If that's all it was—"

"I'm not descending to protestations—"

"All right, Vern, I'll accept it. But never again. *Please*. You can be quiet and solitary here as you like."

"I've heard that before."

"It's true. Yesterday afternoon I ordered the music room to be sound-proofed."

"How considerate."

"I don't like your tone. You're the most difficult man I ever met in my life."

"Then why do you bother with me?"

He regretted it the moment he said it. But it was out now.

She looked amazed, and then infuriated.

"That—you cold, selfish, self-seeking beast—is what I keep asking myself. I get absolutely nothing but grief out of this marriage."

Vern reacted with a deadly coldness, an absolute indifference as if he looked at her as a specimen through glass.

It had not occurred to him before, but it did now. A well-bred, handsome young man started in the social set had a wide choice of marriages for money. He had been so concentrated on the Pellingham house, he had developed a blind spot.

Nevertheless, this was unfinished business.

Now was the time to retract and apologize and say how did we ever get this way. But he could not.

"I think that. I know that."

"Then here's something else you'd better know, Vern Harrison. Play around if you like, but I'll never divorce you. You'll never get free of me as long as I live. I don't believe in divorces. But disgrace me and you can go to work. I won't support you. And furthermore I will sue the woman."

He put his hand in his pocket and fervently clasped the beloved little red leather book. Mentally he put down ten new strokes in it.

"Well, it's nice to know where I stand," he said nonchalantly. "Allow me to open the door for you."

He went to it and held it open.

Enid gasped. Then she drew herself up and walked out. She paused to give him a stinging slap in the face as she passed. The shock immobilized him.

The points were mounting up so fast to the sinister total that Vern realized the appointment with death would come upon him before he was entirely ready.

He must go a little slower and not be so lavish in his point system. Instead of adding another row of strokes on account of the slap, he erased a few.

Next spring would be the ideal time. Not too soon. Not too late either. He had decided that Enid should not open the house at Pellingham for another summer. Her reign there was forever over.

A maid knocked at the door and, getting no reply, entered with her arms laden with clean towels and linen.

"Madame has gone out shopping," she said. "She said not to wait lunch. She'll be back later."

He almost asked her why she omitted the customary "Sir" and thought better of it.

He went to the music room and relieved his feelings in Enid's absence by filling the apartment with dissonant thunder.

His pleasure was rudely cut short.

Soames entered the music room looking almost distraught.

"Please come at once, sir. Madame has met with an accident."

Vern was conscious of a sudden wild thrill.

There was nothing to be thrilled about. Enid was in her bedroom being tended by the cook and Nora. A taxi driver was in the foyer calling his company on the telephone, the routine for the insurance company.

The temperature had dropped after the rain started, and the street outside had a light coat of ice.

Enid had walked to the corner when she left the house and hailed a taxi. It had skidded and mounted the curb before the driver got it under control. It had grazed Enid on the thigh and gently knocked her down.

She was hardly bruised, not suffering from shock and actually complaining that all the fuss, including the solicitude of the taxi driver, was preposterous.

Summoned by Soames, her own doctor came. He talked about delayed shock and prescribed bed for the rest of the day. Soames was delegated to call the Fosters and postpone the dinner date. In half an hour all the commotion was over.

Vern was finally left alone with her.

"I should leave you rest," he said.

"Don't be ridiculous. I've had a shock, yes. Not the kind they think. Something I want to talk to you about. This accident taught me something, Vern."

"It must have been a horrible experience."

"It was. But not the way I would have imagined had I

ever thought about it. The taxi—I thought, ‘Here’s death’ when I saw it coming. And I couldn’t move. That was the awful thing.”

“You poor girl. I can understand that.”

His feeling was genuine. He had a horror of helplessness. He had known too much of it.

Her voice softened, but she went on implacably. “That wasn’t all. I thought, ‘He’ll be rich and free and he never loved me.’ How awful for that to be my last thought if I were killed. It struck me afterwards.”

Vern was silent. She waited, expecting him to speak, but the silence lengthened.

“Have you nothing to say, Vern?”

“If that’s what you think, what can I say?”

“You don’t disagree with it?”

“No, I agree. It *would* be awful for that to be your last thought.”

Now she was silent for a minute. He was lighting a cigarette in his elegant unhurried way and she watched him.

Her straight thin brows drew together.

“I don’t want it to be, the next time. It shocked me into serious thinking. Life is uncertain. You feel healthy and strong as if you can live forever. But you’re wrong. Violence lurks in wait. It can all be over in a minute.”

His stomach contracted. A strange, almost sickening thrill ran through him, its terrible elation leaving him exhausted.

Her voice was going on.

“So I thought I should change my will.”

She waited for comment, but he could not speak.

“Not tomorrow, Vern, or next week. But immediately.”

He was still speechless.

“*Vern!* Have you nothing to say?”

“What am I supposed to say? That’s your privilege. And you must remember you don’t confide in me. I don’t know enough about your private affairs to discuss them with you. You seem to be hinting you left me something.”

"Left you something!" Her voice went up. "Why, the week we were married I made a new will and left you *everything*. Don't sit there looking as if I had merely passed you the salt."

Vern's heart was thumping so hard he put his hand over it.

"I'm overwhelmed, Enid. Why? Why leave out all your relatives?"

"Because they disapproved of my marriage. What right have they? Besides, they have plenty, more than is good for any of them."

Her moving lips kept their prim, straight line. Vern drew deeply on his cigarette. His voice was calm.

"But now you're changing all that?"

"I don't know. It depends on you. That's why I'm talking to you. If only we could come to some normal human understanding."

"I didn't know we didn't have one. I agree that's desirable for kindness' sake. Never mind your money."

Her eyes searched his face, glittering with suspicion.

"That's progress, if you mean it. Which I never know. There's a problem about no divorce. I can't entirely disinherit you unless I divorce you. So I've changed my mind about that. If you're unfaithful—or make a fool of me—goodbye. There'll be a divorce."

Six years of jail for nothing! Fury swept through Vern like a dark red flame.

He jumped up from his chair. "You disgust me with your worship of money. I'm not going to stay and be insulted. If you think I give a damn for your money you're mistaken."

She called him back from the door.

"Oh, Vern, if only I could *believe* that!"

He came back, willingly. "How can I prove it, unless I sign a waiver to all you have?"

"You would do that?"

"Naturally. If you wish it. Send for your lawyer. The sooner the better."

He stood over her, tall, young and arrogantly handsome.

Her face softened as she looked up. Ten years slid from her face as he watched it.

"But that's the last thing I want. I want you to have my money. I mean I want you to have it if you even care a little for me. Look in my eyes, Vern. Answer me honestly. Did you or did you not marry me for my money?"

He thought at once of his blind obsession to get back to the Pellingham House, as if it were part of him, as if life would be ever too much for him without its sanctuary.

He looked into her eyes between their short, faded red lashes. He said firmly, "I did not."

She reached for his hand and he let it remain in her dry, hot fingers.

"I'm a fool, I suppose. But I do so want to believe it."

"Then use your boasted logic, Enid. There are a great many susceptible women available with fortunes. Why should it be you in particular—had there been no other reason?"

"Younger women, too," she murmured. "Beautiful. And they all like you. I suppose it's true. I must be satisfied. But—"

"But what?"

"You used to tell me you loved me—before we were married."

If he didn't go on working at it, he would lose all the work already invested.

"Love goes into hiding, Enid, in the face of suspicion, inquisition."

He put his other hand over her restless fingers. She turned her head away.

"Vern, I'm sorry. How did we get this way?"

He was suddenly inspired to accuse himself.

"I'm to blame. I've lived such a free life. So I never think to account for my movements. No one ever took the slightest interest in my comings or goings."

"You poor boy. I care where you go—and where you

are and what is happening to you. Remember that. So I never want to hear of you going off alone to be ill in a hotel again."

He trembled with apprehension and excitement. Now was the moment.

"It isn't very likely. I had to pawn my watch to do it."

He waited for her acid temper. Her hand moved in his but she said nothing.

Gathering courage, he continued. "Owning a Cadillac and now a Rolls when I can't even write a check to pay the garage has a touch of the ridiculous."

"I pay all the bills."

"Exactly. So you know where I've been, what I've bought and what I've been doing. I wouldn't ask you to change your ways, but I do ask you why you do it. I've never heard of another man in this peculiar position."

Her voice was low, as if ashamed, but she was truthful.

"It's partly your elusiveness, but also partly that I have grown up with habits, too. One of having everything under control. If only I could trust you—"

"I can tell the truth, Enid, but I can't make you believe it. So I'll ask you this. Why should a proud woman want to hold something that doesn't want to be held?"

She looked at him with such agony that he knew he was safe and had been all along.

"Don't you?"

"Good heavens, would I be here this minute if I didn't want to be here more than anywhere else in the world? I'm selfish. You've said it. So if I'm here it's where I want to be."

"Without the money that gives you freedom?"

She was hurting herself more than she was hurting him.

He could be patient. "I'm no stranger to earning a good living. Let's not forget that, shall we?"

The muted ring of the bedside telephone. Soames's voice, equally muted. "Mrs. Foster is calling, sir. She wants to know if Madame feels well enough to receive her."

"Madame would be delighted," said Vern, expressing his own emotion at this opportunity for escape. "Tell Mrs. Foster to come up."

Enid withdrew her hand from his as the knock came at the door.

"Forgive me, Vern. I was wrong. This very day I will change that—impossible situation."

A plump dark-eyed woman entered, her round face glowing with the outdoor cold above her dark mink collar. She carried a florist's basket tied with pale green ribbons and holding what looked like five pounds of violets.

Vern never could understand what these two had in common, his wife so prim and spinsterish, managing and critical. The other so genial, broad-minded and happy-go-lucky. He liked Mae, and because she was uncritical, she liked him. Or appeared to do so.

He left the two women together.

He went to the music room and sat looking at the sheets of manuscript on the rack. There was no music in him now, although he felt extraordinarily contented, even elated.

Enid would keep her promise to open a checking account for him today. In the meantime he had about two hundred dollars in his wallet from the pawning of his watch.

He could spend this today and get his watch back tomorrow. He need not wait in for Enid to give him a check to open that account.

He shut the piano and went out.

He stepped into a crawling taxi and told the man to drive him to a department store at Thirty-fourth Street. It would be stupidity to see Lily again and risk, for a girl who meant nothing to him, the golden promise of his future.

But to send her a present for her new apartment would

be a gracious gesture of farewell, and also soften what might be a blow.

He didn't want anything too personal. Yet she rented furnished apartments. What then? He recalled she had complained she could not create the atmosphere she liked because, at night, that depended on the lights.

He chose a pair of reading lamps, paying for them with cash, and had them sent.

He had burned the page from the book of doom, but her address remained with him as if written with flame.

A surprise awaited him when he returned home.

Enid was not only up and about, but, summoned by wire to an ailing aunt's bedside, she had got ready in an hour and flown to Boston.

Soames handed Vern a letter Enid had left for him.

Vern dear, I tried to contact you by phone but no one could find you.

Aunt Sophie has been operated on twice for cancer. I don't believe she would have asked for me unless she knew she were dying.

Family is family at times like these, no matter the differences, so I've gone.

I'll telephone you this evening.

Be good while I'm gone. Love—Enid.

P.S. As promised, here is a check to open an account.

There will be another on 1st January for the same amount and the first of the month from then on.

Vern opened the check folded in half. "Three hundred dollars," he read in his wife's small, neat handwriting.

Such a rage tore up through him that the room seemed too small to breathe in.

Three hundred paltry dollars a month! For the husband of the rich Mrs. Vernon Harrison who could just as easily give him five hundred dollars a week. Hate seethed in Vern.

Too bad her murder must be slow, careful and clever, instead of violent and painful. So that she would know she was dying, so that she would feel the anger of his hands.

The telephone rang. He heard it as if it were far off. Soames came noiselessly across the mossy rug.

"Boston, sir. Madame is calling."

Vern collected himself as he went to take the call on the library desk.

"Enid, I was astonished at your action after what happened this morning. I hope you're all right."

"Of course I'm all right," she said impatiently. "And a lot you cared—disappearing—going out. But that isn't the point. Aunt Sophie is dying. I've got to stay here. It's only a matter of time."

It gave him a queer kind of kick to delude himself he had any right to protest, or cared to, like an ordinary husband.

"Why must it be you? I thought you had a dozen or so competent female relations."

"Don't be silly, Vern. I know what I ought to do. Also I'm the only one left in this family who knows how to act in a crisis, who keeps a head on her shoulders."

"You know best I suppose. Time? How much time?"

"It may be any day or three weeks from now. I'll let you know from day to day. I'm sorry. This will spoil your Christmas."

He was cheered by a sudden evil glee.

"Why think of that at such a time? There's always next Christmas. I'll count on that to be wonderful."

"Oh, Vern, it will. Now you're talking like you used to talk. I must go now. Goodbye—*darling*."

"Goodbye, dear."

"Oh—and Vern—"

"Yes?"

"Never mind. It'll do when I get home."

He would not ask what she was going to say. He would

rather not know. He might have to thank her for the three hundred dollars.

"Goodbye, then."

"Goodbye."

What to do now with the unexpected gift of freedom? He decided to dress and go to a play.

While he was changing, a call came through on his bedroom extension. It was Mae Foster.

"Come and dine with us, Vern?"

He thanked her, telling her it was too late.

"Tomorrow then? Remember, this is your other home. Wouldn't you like to use the guest room here till Enid comes back? I don't want to think of you having a lonely Christmas."

"Thanks, Mae. If I'm lonesome I'll call up. I'll be glad to come over."

He was irritated. Did she think he had no personal social resources? Obviously. The hell of it was she was right. He'd never been a good mixer. He could count the friends he cared to be with on the fingers of one hand, and they were at sea or living abroad.

The play was good but it did not even distract him. When he left the theatre he couldn't have told what it was all about. But he slept well, rose early and went straight to the piano. He thought of Pellingham, the roar of the angry water, the gulls crying and flying low over the icy green sea.

He thought of Captain Piers' warm sitting room with the ruddy fire and the old man's gruesome collection of curios bristling from every surface that would hold them, even from the walls. Weapons, ju-jus, fetishes, even shrunken heads with their long black hair and preposterous eyelashes.

Then he thought of the great living room at the Pellingham house with its immense fireplace where huge logs used to blaze in his grandmother's day and the big view window high over the dunes framing leagues of tossing sea.

He was seized with almost unbearable nostalgia.

It was good to be free and independent, but it was not good to be alone.

He thought of Lily.

It was inevitable that he would go to see her.

She had both bedroom and living room in her new apartment. The lamps were unpacked and lit when he arrived. The new atmosphere was much more pleasant than the other, partly because of his lamps. Warm and softly lit and with a bowl of yellow chrysanthemums on a gate-legged table, it had a look of home waiting to welcome him.

There was a rich odor of good cooking.

She did not look at all astonished when he knocked and she opened the door to him. But she looked transfigured as if the sight of him filled her heart with light.

She took his hand and drew him in. "Dinner's almost ready. I knew you were coming."

"Because I sent the lamps?"

"Oh, no, there is another way of knowing."

He didn't want to go into that. Let the future take care of itself. Now he was temporarily at peace.

Later, after he had made love to her, Vern decided that this would be the last time he would ever see her. She was becoming too much a part of him.

"This is heaven," she whispered as they rested beside each other.

Then she was silent and very still, her living warmth so close against him he hardly felt it.

"Are you asleep?" he said at last.

"No. I'm fire-watching. Also thinking."

He crushed out the cigarette.

"Thinking what?"

"I'm always wondering what you think of me. Really think of me. Whether you think I'm cheap—because really I'm not. This is different. This—"

He put his hand over her mouth.

"Don't—don't—"

Then he kept her mouth closed with a kiss. It lasted a long time. It had a quality of nearness in it, a feeling of sharing, of closeness more poignant than the delirious connection of the body. It seemed a stronger antidote to loneliness. He went on kissing her till he fell asleep.

The next morning as they were having breakfast Vern thought he had never seen a woman look so fresh and young and appealing straight from sleep. She looked so natural, so relaxed, so completely stripped of artifice that he had a feeling of intimacy and belonging he had not yet experienced under any circumstances with any woman.

The thought startled him so much, he sat looking at her trying to analyze it and forgot to drink his coffee.

"I know," said Lily, showing embarrassment, "I forgot to put lipstick on."

"It suits you. It makes you look like a child."

"But I'm not one. And Vern, I've decided to speak to you about that."

He drank his coffee while she talked to him.

"First of all did you lose your beautiful watch?"

"I wouldn't like to tell you where that is."

"Just what I thought. Well Vern, naturally I've been thinking. You're well-bred and well-educated and you have expensive tastes. You're composing, and that's like writing and painting and acting and whatever. You can't make good all at once, like—like being a shipping clerk in a department store. So I thought—"

He couldn't stand it.

"So you thought you'd offer to finance us while I got going."

She looked in the bottom of her coffee cup, but she answered bravely. "Something like that. I knew you'd be angry. I'm glad you are. But facts are facts. They grow on you and you have to accept them. Think about it anyway."

He stubbed out his cigarette in the saucer of his empty cup and rose.

"Thank you, Lily. It was a nice thought. Now I have to go."

He was already opening the closet in the living room to get his overcoat.

She said no more about her proposition.

"Happy Christmas, Vern darling."

She waited for him to take her in his arms and kiss her with the conviction of a lover. He could not. Yet this was goodbye. What would she be saying now if he told her it was goodbye for ever?

He didn't care. He didn't love her. Yet a dull pain was in his chest as if his illness were coming back.

"The same to you, Lily."

She patted the left side pocket in his vicuna overcoat.

"There's a little Christmas present for you in there. Don't open it till tomorrow morning."

"Thank you, dear." He kissed her lightly on the forehead and picked up his hat. "Thank you, Lily dear, for everything."

Vern went home and shortly afterwards Enid arrived, thin with fatigue, pale and old in somber black. This is my wife, thought Vern with distaste, dutifully kissing her.

"Come to my room. I have things to talk over," she said.

He followed her. Soames arrived shortly after bearing a silver tray with the strong black tea she had learned to like on her visits to London. He always knew what she wanted. Sometimes he acted as if he read her mind.

Vern shuddered slightly. How easy it would be for Soames to destroy his carefully fabricated scheme as easily as he would break a spider's laborious web with a touch of his finger, because Enid's reactions were so boringly predictable.

He listened to her with half his attention. Nothing about her family concerned him except the fact that she would be richer than ever when the old lady's will was probated.

Ought he to delay his plans till that had taken place?

His blood stirred and he felt the terrible thrill of anxiety.

No, he would know no peace till the job was accomplished. The suspense was becoming unendurable.

"Vern," said Enid so loudly that he jumped, "answer me."

"Yes, yes, you are right, of course."

"I knew it. You're in another world. You look so distraught. What is the matter with you?"

"I'm sorry. It's the creative spell. I was listening to music in my mind, some phrases forming."

She sighed. "If only it were good music."

"What do you mean, *good* music?"

"Something one could sponsor with pride. Symphony for instance. One could hire Town Hall and you could conduct it with an orchestra."

He went along with it for the sake of diverting her.

"That's possible. That's feasible. You haven't heard my new tone poems. The seasons at the Cape. The sea in all its moods. The gales of spring, the roar of winter."

"Hard work," she said, "and responsibility."

Mentally he put a mark in the red book.

"Nobody, my dear Enid, need remind a serious artist that art is discipline."

She laughed. "Vern, you're marvelous."

"Meaning?"

"The way you fool yourself. Oh, now don't take offense! I like it, Vern. Does me good to be back in the land of the ridiculous."

His hand went in his pocket and closed over the book that enabled him to endure her presumption.

"A strange remark I must say."

She stopped laughing and her face had a bleak look. "I thought so, too, when I heard it. That's what my aunt called it. I only inherit if I divorce you, so that you can never benefit."

Vern heard this with actual pleasure. He had nothing

to lose by keeping to his intention to become a widower before the summer.

"I understand her. Alas, how bitter to contemplate the picture of a strong young man profiting by the cash she worked so hard for."

"That isn't kind."

"Not meant to be. May I go now?"

"Oh, please no, Vern. I *am* tired. I do need you. I need sympathy. I need something. Oh, how did we get this way the moment I came home? What can be the matter with us?"

He saw her desperate need of companionship, intimacy, compassion, but he felt nothing but frozen hardness.

"You were saying I fool myself. Don't you fool yourself a little, thinking that friendship can be won that way?"

"Now you call it friendship. Don't you love me any more, even a little?"

His convulsive grip mangled the little red leather book.

"Of course, Enid. I love you a lot."

"But you say it so coldly."

"It's not something I can talk about any moment, anywhere. You've told me I'm difficult to understand. I admit it, but I can't explain myself."

"At least you don't pretend," she said. "And that would be so easy."

Vern smiled. Pretending to love Enid had been the most difficult feat in his experience. He was relaxed by the humor of her ignorance.

She smiled back, grateful for his good humor.

"Pay no attention to me. I'm worn out. Don't know what I'm saying. I'll get into a robe and lie down. Haven't slept the last three nights." She put him in his place with her carelessly truthful words. "You don't know what it's like going through a death in our family."

"It certainly is not for want of willingness to share the brunt of the experience."

She looked astonished. "Why, Vern, I do believe you mean that."

"I do mean it. I'm not quite the weakling you think. Remember it, Enid. Next time there is unpleasant duty to perform, you may depend on me."

She grew more and more astonished, and the implication didn't flatter him. "I feel as if I'm only just getting to know you. Pardon the cliché, but there seems more in you than meets the eye."

He felt the leather book crumple as he squeezed it savagely.

"A great deal more. How any man could be the witless cipher you think I am is quite beyond me. There's no such animal."

"You're angry, aren't you?"

"Naturally."

"I don't blame you. I guess I was so busy thinking out my own disappointment I didn't think of your side. It hasn't always been very nice for you, has it?"

He could have laughed at the understatement.

"Not always. I'll go now and let you get some sleep."

"Come here, Vern."

Shaking with repressed fury, he went to her.

She turned up her haggard face. "You haven't really kissed me since I came home."

He braced himself and kissed her forehead.

She caught his hands and prevented his escape.

"It's your fault I'm so irritable, so unjust at times. But you wouldn't understand that. Kiss me darling, I love you, really kiss me."

He shut his eyes and kissed her thin lips. Three hundred dollars a month, he thought. His stomach turned over.

He had sleepless nights and longed for sex. He longed for Lily in his arms, too, but he resisted the dangerous temptation to go to her.

Just another month or two of steel-willed purpose and he would be able to do as he damn pleased.

Enid had to go back to Boston to help sort and pack

a ton or so of mildewed personal property garnered by her aunt over many years. And distribute it.

She flew to and fro to save time, but the endless conferences with her family sapped her strength. She grew too tired to sleep and the family doctor gave her sleeping pills.

She took little notice of Vern except to police his movements in subtle ways not lost on his lively intuition.

It was the middle of March before she relaxed and began to resume a fulltime interest in the life she had made for herself.

She blamed herself for Vern's retreat and tried to win him back with tactics he anticipated while she was still thinking of them. He ignored them, pretending an obtuseness he wouldn't have imputed to the lower animals.

By making much of the doctor's prescription of sleep and more sleep, he parried the veiled invitations to Enid's bedroom.

Time was his friend and time was bringing his liberation nearer and nearer to him.

He grew so nervous that on the wild March night Enid grew desperate, he cried out in fright when she woke him slipping carefully into his bed.

His heart hammered like prisoned thunder when she talked baby talk and tried to comfort him like a small boy waked out of a nightmare.

Only the exquisite revenge of his plan kept him sane.

While he shivered in her embrace, he imagined the pleasure of choking her to death with his bare hands.

She had lost weight since the last time he had been called on for such duty, and he found it gruesome to be in contact with her clammy skin and prominent bones.

Nevertheless, he was both humiliated and disturbed by the failure of his manhood. Enid's sympathy and tactless talk of medical help and hormones burned into his mind like corrosive acid.

Was it possible that continence, aversion and nervous

strain had impaired his maleness just at the moment he wanted to exchange existence for living?

He was seriously frightened by the possibility because he knew nothing of such things.

Always a healthy male, he had taken his health and potency for granted.

He excused himself with suppressed fury, got out of bed, got into a Jacquard silk robe, lit a cigarette and started prowling the bedroom.

"I don't sleep," he complained. "The city gives me the jitters. I can't work. Nobody lets me compose. I'm frustrated."

Enid played into his hands.

"If only the weather were a bit warmer, you could take the Rolls and spend a few days in Pellingham."

He had been wondering how to break the news he was going there, turning it over in his mind for days.

"But I like the wild weather. And I want to listen to the winds howling through the chimneys. I want to get it into the winter movement of my new composition."

Enid was resigned.

"The dust covers are on everything and the house will be damp. I can't spare a servant."

Vern concealed his jubilation.

"It won't be perfect up there alone, but I won't annoy anyone working on the piano. I'll phone Captain Piers. He can light the fires a couple of days ahead."

"That awful old man!"

"What's awful about him, Enid? He can do anything and he's dependable."

"He used to keep you up all night listening to his stories."

"He won't this time. I'm going to sleep, sleep, sleep."

"If you can, of course. I told myself that when I was in Boston."

"It's never failed. My old room. The salt air blowing the curtains. The roar of water along the beach. The wind singing."

He lit another cigarette and resumed pacing.

Enid sighed, a long shuddering sigh like a child who had been crying.

"Guess I'll go back to my room. I can't sleep while you're prowling about, and I do need it."

He said nothing. In a few minutes she acted on her suggestion.

He returned to bed at once. He was elated, almost happy. He could hardly believe fate had made things so easy for him. He slept.

He remembered the moment he woke that he was liberated. But he was afraid she would change her mind. If she did, he would hold his ground and lay on her the responsibility of having made the suggestion.

Enid didn't change her mind.

She seemed under intolerable strain, snapped at everyone and apologized for it. But she would not discuss what was troubling her.

She listened to Vern talking to Captain Piers long distance and offered no advice or interference.

Vern told the old man to expect him in three days.

He laid down the phone and spoke with care to keep the joy from exposure in his voice.

"I'd like you to come with me to dinner and the theatre, some quiet place where you wouldn't be seen, and if we can get tickets to something worthwhile at short notice."

"Soames knows how to do that."

Soames accomplished it.

Now that his trip to the Cape was a *fait accompli*, Vern had something else to worry about. He wondered whether his impotence was a serious symptom and whether he ought to humiliate himself by consulting a doctor.

There had been times when he had felt an even greater dislike for Enid and yet been able to act his part.

As the day wore on he tried to reason himself out of his panic, but it only grew bigger. He did not notice what he ate for dinner and he did not know what the play was about.

He complained of a headache in the second intermission to prepare Enid for what he meant to do when he had escorted her home.

"My head is worse," he said as they entered the warm, silent entrance hall. He pushed the elevator button. "You go on up and go to bed. I'll go out in the fresh air and walk it off."

She looked at him, and he could see her thoughts moving behind her face. She was suspicious, but doubted her own doubts.

"You looked pale all day, Vern. You won't be long?"

"No, I won't be long. Just around a couple of blocks."

The elevator door opened.

"Good night, then, Vern. I hope you'll feel better."

"Good night, Enid. I'm sure I will."

The door closed on her and he was free. Free to go to Lily and find out if something terrible had really happened to him before he made a fool of himself consulting a specialist about nothing.

He got to Lily's apartment just before midnight and he could see the apricot-tinted light from her bedroom windows three floors above the street.

He went up the emergency staircase so as not to compromise her.

He rang a long time at her door before she came to it, opened it on the chain and said fearfully, "Who is it?"

When she saw it was he she opened it and the tears were running down her face as he took her in his arms.

"Oh, Vern, Vern, how can you do this to me? I thought you were never coming again. I didn't know what to do. I nearly went crazy."

She had got out of bed to answer the door and she had her white chenille robe on over her nightie. He could feel her warm, firm, lusciously young body in the embrace of his arms. He felt her warm, fragrant lips covering his face with kisses. The life of the flesh stirred and he felt a familiar thrill.

He unclasped her arms and set her away from him.

"I haven't long to stay, Lily. But I just had to see you."

"I should hope so. What's been keeping you away such a long, long time?"

He took off his black evening overcoat and his heavy white silk scarf. He was in white tie and tails.

"Heavens!" said Lily. "How handsome you look all dressed up. So you've got a job."

"A job?"

"I suppose you call it an engagement, being a musician."

He laughed. **"So I don't have to explain to you."**

She went into the living room and switched the lamps on.

"No. But I wish you would. The suspense you put me through is killing me."

"It's killing me, too. Suspense of a different kind. How do you think I feel, not being able to come and see you?"

"I wouldn't know, Vern. Why don't you tell me?"

She was sitting in the corner of the divan and there was something honest and hard and rather frightening in the way she was looking at him.

"I asked you to trust me for a little while. Soon I will explain everything."

"At least tell me why you can't explain to me now."

"There isn't time tonight, Lily. I have only an hour to spend with you. I have to get back to play again at that night club."

"At least tell me the name of the night club."

"Lily, Lily, this isn't like you."

"You're right. It isn't. But how can I be like myself when I'm nearly beside myself?"

He kept his temper so that he should not deviate from his objective.

"Doesn't it occur to you I might be going through something, too?"

"It does. And that sounds like a fugitive from a wife."

"So that's what worries you?"

"Truthfully, Vern, it does. Otherwise there's no explanation for your strange way of treating me."

"That you can think of, Lily. You are very far from the right one."

He turned up her face and began to kiss her. Her arms went round his neck.

"Then tell it to me, Vern. Tell it to me. Don't keep me in this suspense, this misery, and besides, Vern—"

He stopped her mouth with a deep, long kiss. He put his hand on her neck, sliding it down her satin shoulder and under her robe. He felt her trembling. She was his.

"Come," he said.

She went into the bedroom and turned out the light.

In a few moments he was in bed beside her, and there was nothing wrong with his strength, his youth, his capacity for the carnal joys of love.

Lily sighed. "It's so awful how weak I am with you. Vern, don't hurry away. Now you're here it's so important to—"

"My job is important," he said, dressing deftly in the semi-dark. "Next time I see you I'll explain everything. I promise. I'll try and drop in to see you again tomorrow."

"If you can't, what then?"

"The next day after."

"You really do promise?"

"I really do. Believe me?"

"Very well."

Somewhere a clock struck one.

"Hell!" said Vern, "I'm on again in ten minutes."

A walk around a couple of blocks! Would Enid be sitting in the entrance hall watching for him? He snatched up his coat and opera hat and ran.

Enid decided he would drive the new Rolls Royce to Pellingham. She phoned the garage and told them to send a man with the car.

He got in to sit by Vern and be dropped as he passed. "Smooth as silk, but she takes driving, sir."

Vern was angry because he would have preferred to take his familiar Cadillac.

"I'm disappointed. I thought I had merely to sit still and give instructions."

The man was silenced. Vern drove through the traffic in a mood of gloom as dark as the lowering sky.

"I may come and join you," Enid had said at parting. "I can't go to any parties or do any entertaining. Let me know if the weather's dry."

But as he drove clear of the city and through the parkways of Connecticut, he was cheered by the magnificence of the car. It made light of the long journey and itself provided a new experience in pleasure. He felt a lightening of spirit. If Enid came she would bring Soames, so it might as well be done in Pellingham as New York.

On the other hand he had studied the methods of the medical examiner in New York State till he could anticipate—he thought—the lift of an eyebrow, and all his case-history study had been on New York cases. He knew nothing whatever of the procedures in the case of suspicious death in the State of Maine.

Having lived with his plan so long he had better stick with it.

He adjusted himself to the idea of her following him and spoiling his pleasure. It would only make the delight of the ensuing freedom all the greater.

And if it turned cold and wet and the winds were high she wouldn't stay long. The winter sea depressed her.

Rain began to spatter on the great car and very soon it was pouring almost as heavily as a cloudburst. The water swirled on the highway. But he was warm and snug inside with a symphony concert coming through the golden-toned radio. The tires bit into the wet surface and the car held the road with the steadiness of a train.

Without stopping to eat or rest he drove on and on.

When he arrived at the Pellingham House it was with a small shock of astonishment that he had arrived so quickly.

The sea and sky were merged in a pit of howling darkness, but afar off he saw that the sturdy isolated house was filled with light.

He turned into the long stony lane off the highway and drove into the garage Captain Piers had opened for him at the back.

He got out, stretched himself and closed the garage door by a pull on the counter that rolled it down from above.

Then he entered the house by the small door next to the tool bench. The homely smell of pine logs blazing, linen airing and fresh coffee perking, met him as he entered the kitchen passage.

"Ahoy, there!" he shouted.

"Ahoy, yourself!" he was answered. But it wasn't Captain Piers. It was a strong, clear but unmistakably feminine voice. He was stabbed by the quality in it that recalled the tones of his grandmother.

Captain Piers came to meet him at the door of the kitchen.

"Dinna be spooked, Vern. That's ma granddaughter. I been low wi' that old fever and she came to look arter me."

Greetings over, the old man jerked his thumb to the glow in the hallway.

"There's a bonny big fire waitin' 'n the livin' room. I'll get your bags from the car and bring your supper int' you."

But Vern had never heard the old man had a granddaughter and must at once satisfy his curiosity.

"I won't allow it. I'll eat in the kitchen. It's enough to ask you to open and warm the house for me."

The old man shrugged his thickset shoulders as one who knows the obstinate character he has to deal with.

Vern entered the big warm kitchen.

"You're lookin' peaked," said the good old man. "Better get at your vittles and get right to bed."

Then Vern saw the girl standing there.

She was almost as tall as he, and she looked very slender in her long dark slacks. A plaid mackinaw opened at the slim brown throat did not conceal the fact of a voluptuously lovely bosom.

"This is Eva," said Captain Piers. "Eva Jones. Ma daughter's girl. Her father was a seafarin' man."

"How do you do, Eva?" said Vern, hoping he did not show his astonishment. For Eva was a genuine beauty. Not because of her health and youth, but because of the individual and sophisticated structure of her face. It was lean and narrow with high cheekbones and thick black tilted eyebrows.

Her skin was brown with wind and sun. She had a widow's peak and long black misty hair.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Harrison," she said formally, and her voice and accent were those of a cultured college girl.

"Eva graduated as a school marm, Vern, but she's spooked. She's takin' time out afore they put her under hatches."

A kindred spirit, he felt, without thinking it. He was thinking of her eyes. They were brilliant sea-blue as the captain's must have been, and they looked like starlight in her strong, yet curiously elfin face.

"She's right to take a second look before the bars close behind her."

Eva smiled. "Don't think I don't like work. It's the clock that intimidates me."

"It's the truth, Vern. What a worker! She's fixed ma garden good at last. Caulked ma boat and painted it. She can do anythin' with a boat. Ought to be sailin' for a livin'. Sort of Tugboat Annie. Come now Eva, where's that supper?"

Eva found the yellow-and-white checked cloth and the yellow china. The three of them ate the homely, delicious meal at the old ship's table.

Then Eva washed the dishes while Vern went round the house with the old man and put screens before the fires.

"We made up the bed in your old room, Vern. But it wouldn't take a jiffy to make it in the master bedroom."

They went up the curved white staircase on the rose-red carpet and along the gallery to the north-east room.

The captain stood back to let Vern enter his sanctuary first. Pine and apple wood smoldered aromatically in the small iron grate.

Vern breathed deeply as if he inhaled the comfort and security of long ago.

"Thanks, Cap," said Vern. "You were right. This is where I'll sleep, and I'm sure I will sleep."

"Then we'll be leavin' you. Eva will drop in and keep the house neat and the hearths swept. And see there's vittles in the larder."

"I don't know that I want—I mean isn't she somewhat above that? Better tell her thanks for all this and not to bother any more."

The old man grinned and lifted his gnarled hand in a salute. "You'll be seein' her tomorrow when you drop by for the curios you asked for. You tell her. She pays no mind to me."

"Very well. What about driving you home? It's blowing half a gale and it must be near two o'clock."

"Thanks, Vern, but Eva's Ford is parked out front. If you need anythin' gimme a ring. Be seein' you then tomorrow."

As he undressed Vern heard the front door slam and the car start up and drive away.

Vern felt the silence of the house like a presence, a presence which understood him and welcomed him home.

He put on his heavy silk pajamas, drew back the faded chintz curtains and turned out the bedside light.

He lay for a while incredulous that he had escaped and that he had accomplished his project of getting back to the house alone.

Had the night been clear he would have been looking at the stars through the branches of the great elm which would still be there to creak and toss in the winds when

his tale had been told and the mystery of his future was behind him.

The thought of the promise of that future sent a thrill of excitement along his nerves.

He smiled in the darkness, stretched luxuriously in the vast bed and, carefree as the child he had once been, went immediately to sleep.

On waking, he was instantly alert to his surroundings.

Instead of the muted roar of New York traffic there was the unbridled roar of the towering sea.

He opened his eyes to the leaden light.

He turned over.

There was the familiar window with the familiar chintz drapes drawn back, the wide window seat with the bookshelves underneath.

Framed in the window was an unfamiliar picture—a bare cloudy expanse of sky.

The tree had gone.

With a loud cry Vern leaped out of bed and looked down. He was in the right room and he was rightly oriented to the garden, but the massive elm had vanished. Even the deep-thrusting roots had been withdrawn as testified by the wide circle of loose and broken ground.

"My tree has gone," he whispered. Then he cried out savagely, "*My tree has gone!*"

Without pause to put on robe and slippers he ran downstairs to the telephone.

Eva answered his call with the news that Grandpa was a little off course and she was keeping him in bed.

"But anything *I* can do for you, Mr. Harrison?"

"The big elm out back. Gone! Ask Cap. Did a storm break it? Did lightning strike? Does he know anything at all about it?"

"Yes, he does, Mr. Harrison." A fragment of silence. "Wait. I guess he'd rather talk about it himself."

Obsessed with his sense of outrage, Vern forgot the old man shouldn't be disturbed.

"Tell him I'm waiting."

The line went dead. After a while Vern hung up and rang again. This time Captain Piers answered the telephone.

"Vern, I'm as sorry as can be about your tree. Your wife ordered some tree surgeons to destroy it and left me in charge of operations. Had I argued with her—or let you know—she would have gone ahead alone. And that woulda bin hopeless."

"The imbecile! The bitch! The she-devil."

"Come now, Vern, it isn't murder. She's a self-willed lady. And it is her house."

"But it is murder! Ruthless slaughter. That soaring fountain of life, that happy tree. It lived, it breathed, it loved. She murdered it because she knew what it meant to me."

Weak with a gone feeling in his chest, Vern paused for breath.

"If ye'd lissen, Vern, 'sted of talkin y'self deaf! *I* too knew what it meant to you. So I took the liberty to save the tree. It cost me plenty, but I like havin' it."

"Don't tell me a tree that size can be transplanted."

"Those tree men are wizards, Vern. To see them work is an education. It's as strong in me ground as if it grew here. Come on over and say hello to it."

"I'm speechless. My good friend—"

"Then don't say nothin," said the old man tartly.

"Someday—" Vern began.

"And don't say that neither. Someday ye'll pay me, someday ye'll take back the tree, get on with what's ahead, forget what's past. Life lives itself if you let it."

The old man began to cough and Eva's protests cut in. Vern obeyed her and hung up.

He went to the panel of the heating system and pressed the buttons. Then he returned slowly up the noble curve of the stairs.

Warmth was already puffing through the grills like summer winds, but it did not alleviate his deadly feeling of cold.

But something else would help.

He found the small red book whose leather binding had taken on a beaten appearance and added another thick, black point.

He counted the points "For" and "Against."

The balance for "Against" numbered exactly one thousand. The lethal number.

He drew a line under the last row of points as if he drew a knife through flesh and wrote beneath it the one word, "Doom."

The Steinway stood at right angles to the great view window in the living room that overlooked the sea.

With a palpable rise in velocity, the wind buffeted the steadfast house. It howled round the chimneys, tore the sand from the dunes and screamed through the power lines and telegraph wires.

Vern exulted in the delirious medley of savage sound. He sat at the piano and, with his head tilted to listen, began to play.

Conscious of his solitude and the isolated situation of the house, Vern wooed the power in him and let it go.

He played till his strength was spent, unaware the gale had dropped and the seas were settling.

It was early afternoon, but the low black overcast dimmed the day which had never quite emerged from night.

Resting his hands on the keys and savoring his release of nervous strain through hours of elemental rapture, Vern became conscious of a ruddy light reflected in the great window and flickering on the walls.

Fire!

He jumped up in alarm and turning saw it was a log fire blazing in the boulder fireplace.

He was shocked with the invasion of his privacy. He had turned on the central heat, but he had lit no fire. Someone had breached the sanctuary of the house.

Self-conscious and angry, he kept himself in check till

he reached the kitchen. If it was the Cap, it would be right, but had it been the girl, Eva! There would be hell to pay. He hadn't escaped from women and their hatred of sound they didn't understand.

The fragrance of fresh coffee told him someone was there before he strode in and saw Eva sitting drinking some at the table in the kitchen.

"I'm not grateful for this, Eva. All I needed was the house warmed and prepared for me. When I'm here alone I like to be alone in it."

There was no change in the calm, starry look she was giving him.

"I know how you feel. I said so, but Grandpa insisted I should drive over and put some food in the oven for you. Otherwise you would starve, he feared." She smiled at his frowning face. "I wasn't worrying."

"Then why didn't you ring the bell?"

She laughed heartily. "I rang and rang. Then I knocked and knocked. The door was open so it seemed silly to try and compete with the noise you were making."

This again, as it would always be.

"So you don't like the noise I make?"

Her face became serious at once and she looked away from him.

"If I said what I thought, Mr. Harrison, you'd think me presumptuous. But I don't tell lies even for tactful purposes. Let's leave it at that."

Vern seethed with fury. He would make her express her truth and so justify himself in forbidding her ever to set foot in his house.

"Why should it be presumption? Say what you think. You don't like the noise I make?"

She put down her coffee cup with a bang and jumped up, looking as if she would slap him.

"What's wrong with you? Getting angry at nothing, or because I acted like you were human, a natural mistake. Sure I won't trespass on your premises any more, but

you've got no right to assume I don't like your music. That's presumption, doing my thinking for me."

"I beg your pardon—"

"You should. And since you welcome what I think, here it is—I think you're right in the same class with Shostakovich. I never got so excited in my life over hearing anyone play the piano. You made it sound like an orchestra. I don't know how you did it, but you made the music sound like the storm and the storm sound like music. I sat here thinking what a pity he's rich, he might have been a genius."

This was so unexpected that Vern was silent.

The girl added, still angry, "So I do like your noises, you see. It's you I don't like."

"I don't blame you," he said humbly. "I was unpardonably rude to you."

Eva relaxed and sat down again. Vern saw that there were two cups and saucers.

"I accept your apology," she said nonchalantly. "Have a cup of coffee."

He sat on the table and had one with her.

"Had anything to eat all day? Don't get excited. I'm not interested. Cap told me to ask you."

"Now I come to think of it, no. But I always notice I'm hungry before my life is in danger."

She laughed and went to the oven where a pie was heating.

Vern watched her take a frozen pack of asparagus from the refrigerator, put it in hot water and fix a salad and mix the dressing. She was competent, but casual, as if her mind wasn't on it.

"How is the old man? Is he up? I had meant to call on him tonight."

"He'll be glad if you do. He's been sorting some horrible curios he's going to give you. Don't say you weren't warned. Shrunk heads and poisoned arrows."

Vern felt the shock in his chest and he tingled all over. He had not calculated on the participation of a third

party. But why not? There was his own household. And most particularly Soames would know about it. He adapted himself.

"Oh, I'm warned. I asked for them. They fascinate the killer in me. I have some stuff to take in exchange. He collects idōls. I collect unusual weapons."

"Don't tell me you're going to take him that flock of things on the hall table?"

"You guessed it."

"They're gruesome, too. I could never figure what you two had in common."

"So now you know," he said, enduring her.

Without even asking him, she laid the dinner on the kitchen table. He could take it or leave it. He sat down with her and took it. This would be the last time she would come without invitation, even if she did like his music.

She gave him a strange look. "I wonder."

He prepared her for the news that she was not going to be wanted.

"This pie's very good, but it's enough pie. You know I like to be alone and do for myself. I have my own way of cooking."

"Any man who likes doing for himself is welcome to it. I don't like wasting my youth and strength doing for them."

"You're a beautiful shrew, Eva. I see why the old Cap is spooked of you. Are you riding with me or did you drive over?"

"You're a handsome phony, Mr. Harrison. I'll ride with you. I walked over. I like walking in the wind and it wasn't raining."

The food in his mouth almost choked him. He swallowed with an effort.

"What do you mean, I'm a phony?"

Without waiting for him to finish, Eva was on her light rope-sole feet disposing of the dishes.

She laughed at his irritation. "What do you mean, I'm

a shrew? Just because I'm not stupid? I should fall on my face and worship you just because you're a man and good-looking? I say you're phony because you're not the same outside as on the inside."

"You're not afraid of God nor man, are you?" He said it because he himself was utterly terrified. His face was cold, but she was busy with her dishes and did not look at him and see it go white. He would kill her if she had seen through him.

"Why should I be? God is good and man is negligible. I'm not afraid of you, anyway."

He went and stood beside her.

"I want you to explain your statement. I'm serious. What do you feel in me with your female intuition that is not as it should be?"

She dried her slender sunburned hands on the dish-cloth.

"That isn't what I said, nor meant." She gave him a searching, level gaze with her fearless sea-blue eyes. "I think you're a good guy inside. It's outside you're such a lady-killing show-off."

His anger changed focus.

"Show-off! How on earth could you say such a thing?"

"Well, aren't you?" She shrugged her slim shoulders in her plaid wool shirt. "There's something I don't get, anyway. It's those feelings women have. You're playing a part. You're not this, I know, so what are you?"

Here was a problem he could not get rid of by telling her not to come back to the house. He would have to see her over at the old captain's or stay away from there. And she would talk to the old man, before and after, and most particularly after. He had to have her on his side. Even if she didn't know there were sides to take.

"You have intuition, Eva. I am playing a part. I'm not the suave social success. I hate the whole business. I'd like to be back at sea. Then I'd like to have a simple studio and enough to get along and stick with my music. But I made my bed and I have to lie in it."

"That's the silliest proverb ever invented. Anyone whose bed is too badly made to rest in, gets out and remakes it. If they have any sense, that is."

"So you don't believe me?"

"Yes, in a way. But after all it isn't my business."

"Then how did we get into this argument?"

"You started it. You said I was a shrew and I am not."

They were very close to each other, facing each other. Eva with her back against the drainboard had no place to retreat.

"I said you were beautiful, didn't I?"

Eva's gaze remained cool, even repellent. "This is not news and I don't care for flattery. I think I'll walk home, so stand out of my way, please."

A dull pain started in Vern's chest and flicked round his ribs. Was there no end to the misery and inner uncertainty he got into through tangling with women?

He stood out of the way. "As you wish, Eva. But if I apologize for calling you a shrew, will you do me the honor of riding home in the car with me?"

Eva burst into merry laughter, threw her arms round his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

"Really, you're easy to fool. You don't know when a girl's teasing, do you?"

Vern's nervous tension snapped. He caught Eva before she could escape, bent her back and kissed her mouth, long and resentfully.

She beat her fists against his chest, but he held on with the strength of his rage and anxiety.

She began to tremble, went limp and suddenly her arms were round his neck and she was returning the kiss with kindled passion. His rage turned to genuine desire. The flame that comes from nowhere when the spark has fuel to feed on.

Eva jerked her head away. "No—no—no—"

"You started this, too. You kissed me first."

"It's not the same. That was fun. Let me go."

"But you like it."

"Let me go. Oh! While there's time—Vern Harrison, you're married!"

"Is that what it is?"

She made another desperate effort to get free.

"I have principles!"

Vern dropped his arms. She moved out of reach with the speed of a panther. He regretted his kindness. Eyes brilliant, cheeks flushed, hair disordered, her beauty was the immemorial temptation. And she was smiling.

"Let's get going," she said. "You've forgotten Grandpa."

Vern had anticipated that evening with the old man as a combination of ego-bolstering friendship, a stimulating session man-to-man and a comforting excursion to his childhood.

But Eva's provocative presence and her disturbing curiosity turned it into one of the most acute experiences of mental anguish he had ever gone through.

She objected to the hideous African jujus being set along the mantelpiece to leer and glare and blight with their evil eyes the peaceful haven of the living room.

She wanted to know why either of them wanted to own and display grisly objects that ought to be lost in museums.

Eva had reason on her side.

Vern remembered the captain's living room as a jumble of ill-sorted Colonial antiques, cheap maple furniture, stacks of books and magazines rising from the floor, curios on every shelf and wall, worn rag rugs and faded old wall paper.

Eva, with her female love of order, had transformed it with knotty pine walls, low built-in bookshelves carrying the captain's bottled-ship collection on the tops, hand-braided rugs, printed linen casement curtains and ruthless elimination of everything she judged would be better in the basement.

In her judgment, there was no place in the house for the gruesome works of savages.

"Tell me something, Mr. Harrison," Eva said. "Honestly, what does your wife say when you take home those things?"

He might have touched a live wire, the shock was so palpable.

"I never know till she sees them. Every time it's something different. I may take them home to find out. Did that angle occur to you?"

He saw her shrink from him. It was no more than a movement in her face, an intent in her body, but it was perceptible.

"You don't have to look like that! After all I was only teasing you."

It was ridiculous, but he was sweating again. He hated this girl as he felt he had never hated anyone.

"Look like what?"

Her insufferable smile was wavering about her mouth.

"As if you could murder me!"

His face went stiff and cold, and he could imagine its grimness and pallor.

"I don't care for your taste in humor. The old man's asleep. Say good night to him for me."

Her smile went wide showing her glistening white teeth.

"Holy mackerel, Mr. Harrison, don't take me so seriously. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

He took his coat from the hat-rack in the tiny hall, opened the door and went out, pulling on his coat as he went down the pathway.

She ran after him and reached him before he started the car. He waited because he saw the big square box she was carrying.

"Here's your share of the bloody loot," she said. "Good hunting with your bows and arrows, and sweet dreams to you."

He rolled down the window and took in the package.

The wind blew the soft silk of her hair into his eyes. He drew back angrily.

"Thanks for remembering it."

The wind beat at her slender body and spread her hair like a banner. She kept her hands on the door frame to steady herself.

"This is really a glorious car!"

So she wants to go riding in it, he thought furiously. That will be never.

"I like it myself. Now let's understand each other, Eva. I don't want help in the house. I never want to walk out and meet you without appointment in ~~the~~ kitchen."

"That's two of us that don't want it. It's as good as done, sir."

He would have liked to ask her to surrender the back door key, but the old captain had had one ever since he married Enid. And what difference? He couldn't be bothered keeping the doors locked while he was in and out up there.

He could bar her with something that was better.

He began to roll up the window, automatically removing her grasp of the door frame.

"You're a beautiful bitch and I don't like you, Eva."

"I don't like you either. What a coincidence."

She was laughing and waving as he gave the car the gas and silently moved away.

She irritated him so much that for a few minutes he forgot his other troubles. He wanted to be alone tonight like a wounded animal wants to crawl into a dark hole yet he felt hideously lonely.

He was a fool to be so disturbed by the girl Eva, but she had shaken the peace that had been on him in the house. The hard-won peace he had come for. To hell with all women.

The light he had left in his house welcomed him as he drew near.

He drove into the garage, pulled down the door, picked

up the precious box and went through the unlocked door into the house.

He heard a small rustling sound and he stopped with every nerve bristling, to listen.

He thought he heard breathing—or did he?

A girl appeared at the end of the little passage, a girl in a red storm coat with the hood hanging back from her tawny hair.

“Vern! Oh, darling Vern. Don’t be mad at me. It’s important. You broke your promise— I had to find— oh, Vern, darling you’ve just got to listen. I’m *desperate!*”

His heart stopped and hung suspended. Then it raced on nearly bursting out of his ribs. She came to him, tears shining on her cheeks, arms extended.

“God in heaven!” he shouted. “How on earth—”

She threw herself on him and hugged him as if she’d found one lost for many years. The box fell and broke open.

“You could have told me you were married. I’d have understood.”

It was Lily.

The telephone rang.

It shocked Vern as if every nerve-end was outside of him. Enid!

He dragged Lily by the hand, his foot kicking the fallen box from his path unheeded, pushed her into the living room.

“Sit by the fire till I come to you.”

He picked up the phone from the hall console table.

There was the familiar flutter in his chest with its accompanying sensation of nausea.

“Hello!”

The captain’s gravelly voice answered him. “Vern, mind how you handle them arrows. No jokin’. There’s death in them.”

“Don’t worry, Cap. This was understood.”

"Mebbe not quite enough. The slightest scratch cud lay you down—then again, it cudn't."

"I don't quite get you."

"They must be mighty old. But some stay potent, some don't. Don't touch the tips, that's all. Mind I'm tellin' you."

"Thanks, Cap. I'll be careful."

"Cudn't sleep without warnin' you. If you land in Davy Jones's locker over them, I'm not responsible."

"You don't have to worry, old friend."

"Opened the box yet, Vern?"

"No, I haven't."

"You'll find a bonus. Eva's idea. You'll find a gourd of dried goo—guess it's curare—the fish-teeth that fancy it up are man-eatin' piranha."

"Why did Eva suggest that?"

"Chance to get rid of the lot, she said." The old man sighed. "What a skipper she'da made! Here she comes to get me to bed."

From the living room came the sounds of the poker breaking up the wood and the crash of a fresh log going on the fire. Making herself at home, Vern thought, as he had done in hers. So now she thought it was her turn.

He put the phone down and stood with his hand on it, thinking fast.

She knew who he was and she knew his situation. But was that so dangerous with a gentle girl like Lily?

She was kind, she was reasonable and she had never been on the make. If he treated her decently he could stall her.

There was very little time left now in which she could be dangerous. Certainly he could keep her out of the way another couple of months. After that nothing she could do or say would matter.

She could have some supper and go to bed. He would get up early in the morning and drive her to the station. The one beyond Pellingham, of course. He would give her the money for her traveling expenses.

It's no use giving way to rage, he thought. She had a raw deal from her point of view.

He went into the living room, grimly smiling.

Lily did not smile back. Her red coat was on the piano bench and she was standing by the fire in a green jersey dress. Vern noted she looked stockier than he remembered her, without realizing it was comparison with the lithe slenderness of Eva.

There was the drawn look of lost sleep in her face.

"Who is Eva? She isn't your wife."

"The girl who tidies the house. Now Lily, I had it coming you'd track me down, but what's so urgent you'd follow me here?"

Lily blushed and looked down at the fire.

"Any other man would guess."

Vern bit back the oath that came to his lips. But he couldn't pretend to take it calmly.

"No," he howled, "not that old chestnut of a situation."

Lily turned her head and looked at him with stern, young dignity. "Yes, Vern. It can happen to you, even if it has grown hackneyed with some centuries of repetition."

Her poise intimidated him. Here it was again, that obstinacy he had sensed in Lily.

"All right, Lily. So it happened. Or you say it happened. So you need money to get it fixed. You can have it. You can have all the ready cash I've got, and I'll send more later. You can stay overnight and go back to town tomorrow morning."

Her mouth curved with contempt and her face stiffened with resolution.

"I kept fooling myself you weren't a heel, but I was only fooling myself."

"You have courage to invade my house and tell me a thing like that."

"What would I need courage for? To talk to a coward? That's all you are, living the way you do."

"What do you know of the way I live? Of why I do what I do? Of what I have to go through?"

"Nothing. That's the trouble. I'm entitled to know about it."

Vern tugged at his shirt collar to relieve the choking sensation.

"Come now, Lily. You're not that simple. What have I ever said that gave you the impression you have any rights in me whatever?"

Her mouth quivered and she clenched her teeth to control it.

"You said you loved me."

He smiled at her with pity and amusement.

Lily broke. She sat on the floor right where she was standing, crossed her arms on her knees, laid her head on them and burst into wild sobbing.

"Oh, Vern, what shall I do? I loved you so. I loved you so."

Now that he had got over the shock of her arrival, he felt as detached from the situation as if it were happening to somebody else.

"What to do? That's easy. There are dozens of abortionists in New York."

"So that's where you'd send me?"

"Certainly not. I don't know any. I'll give you the money. You get an address from your girl friends."

She raised a white, tear-stained face.

"I don't know any such girl friends. Or any such doctors."

"Then the way you live, you ought to."

Lily breathed hard and stopped sobbing, nerved by her anger.

"The way I live, Vern, I don't need such people. I wouldn't kill my child to save your face, nor even my own. That's murder."

Her stark frankness appalled him. He said hoarsely, "Lily, don't talk that way."

"It's true! Why are you so terrified? Think I'm going to see your wife and spill the whole dreadful story?"

"Lily, you're not like that!"

Her courage grew as his faltered.

"I thought I wasn't, but the way you treat me, I don't know what I'm like. Maybe this isn't the first time you've hurt a girl like me, maybe you've got it coming."

A vein throbbed in his temple making a core of pain. He sat on the floor beside her.

"Relax, Lily. I had other troubles on my mind and your arrival took me aback. I don't even know what I'm like myself. Let's find out by talking it over."

Vern, limp and upset, sat for a little while collecting himself. Lily seemed to be going to sleep right where she was.

"Lily, how long is it since you've eaten anything?"

She didn't answer him. He rose and looked down at her, his mind growing blanker.

He needed time to think. Better let her sleep. He roused her sufficiently to lead her upstairs. His mind was not too blank to find an ironic satisfaction in taking her into the master bedroom and making up Enid's bed.

She had a small dressing-case with her. He placed it on the chair beside the bed without comment and showed her the bathroom door.

The bathroom lay between the two big front bedrooms available to both of them.

He walked through it and bolted it on the far side after him without being aware of any particular reason. He went back to Lily. She was sitting on the end of the bed, absently fingering the pale blue satin comforter.

She said in a dazed way, "Me worrying how to help, and you're rich. Such beautiful things in this house."

"Go to bed, Lily, sleep, you're half there already."

He went out and left her to go to bed alone as if there had never been intimacy between them.

Downstairs he mixed a drink of White Rock and old brandy and took it into the living room. His hand was

shaking, and he spilled it on the thick pale carpet. He was shivering with cold, inside and out.

He thought suddenly of the package lying on the floor in the back passage. He gathered it up with extreme care and took it up to his bedroom. Put it on the floor of the closet without examining it.

On the way down, he paused at the door of Lily's room and listened. No sound. No movement. He went back to the living room. While she slept he could think his way out—if there was a way out of this kind of trouble.

As if an audible voice spoke in his head, he heard the words: *Lily must not have a child by me.*

He shuddered and gulped down what was left of his brandy.

He had an absolute horror of being the father of a child. He had never analyzed this aversion because he liked himself the way he was and saw no reason why every male on earth should be paternal.

He accepted the idea that the responsibility of a family could only restrict, even ruin his life.

But now he found the loathing went deeper. It was eating him like corrosive acid to think of Lily Matthews, a working girl, a mediocrity, sharing with him the fashioning of a child. Producing a new human being, a willful personality with potential for future trouble, a blend of flesh and blood, part his, part hers. Unthinkable—intolerable!

He put his hands to his head and paced the floor.

Why, the girl must be mad to defy him, to claim a right to go ahead with this horrible project, to let the inexorable miracle of birth have its way with her. And so involve him.

Or was it deliberate? The immemorial trap? The unanswerable argument? The irresistible weapon?

Lily alone in the city, pinning her hopes to a pick-up. Such girls invited calamity, even invited murder.

Murder!

But that was too complicated with Lily. He would have to dispose of her body.

His mind went cold and clear, everything ticking sweetly as a new-oiled watch. It had lived with murder for months and worked at its best in that familiar territory.

There was the devouring sea, and in the shelter of the dunes under tarpaulin lay the small boat he used to get into deep water for swimming.

He drew back the heavy fawn-colored drapes to see how the water was settling down. It was still too rough for the boat, but a few more hours would make a lot of difference if the gale had blown out. He saw the black trees now swaying gently in the fitful light of the moon.

It would be calm enough tomorrow night and black as a crow's wing before the moon rose.

He thought of the ways of drowned bodies and how they came up to float buoyed by their gases of putrefaction. How the currents bore them coastward and the tides cast them home on alien shores. But never too alien for the man-hunters to identify the pitiful remains.

If he put a body in the deep it would stay down. No bags of stones tied to the feet which slid away as the fish ate the flesh. The weights must be stitched inside a tarpaulin with the body.

Vern let the curtain drop and returned to the friendship of the fire. He had sailcloth and needles, but that was all such hard and tedious work.

He was startled by the soft sound of footsteps overhead. He looked up at the beamed ceiling, listening. Yes, definitely, she was moving about.

Now if only she could see reason, she could save a lot of trouble.

The poor, charming, stupid little idiot! What did she imagine she could achieve?

He went upstairs.

The bedside lamp was on, and supple as a child, Lily was sitting cross-legged on Enid's bed smoking.

Her sandy hair was tied back with a bright green ribbon. Her white pajamas were thin showing the curves and tints of her body, but she was warm. She was staring into the red-hot heart of Enid's electric fire.

"So you can't sleep," he said.

She gave him a straight, unsmiling look. "Did you think I could?"

He closed the door and went and sat on the end of the bed. He smiled and his voice was gentle.

"In view of what's happened I don't blame you for tracking me down. The night I was sick, Lily. Did you look in my wallet? For my driving license?"

"I was going to, but you stirred like you were waking up. I was afraid that could make a misunderstanding."

"Then how?"

"That last night—you left your white silk evening scarf. The monogram was V.H. instead of H.V. I figured you transposed it, so I looked it up in the telephone book. The first one I tried was Vernon Harrison."

Vern was silent while he controlled his anger.

"So you phoned me?"

"Naturally. A man replied, 'Mrs. Vernon Harrison's residence,' so I knew. I said I was the girl from the music copying office. I had a score ready and you were to call for it.

"He said you were out of town and did I want the address so I could mail it. I said yes, you told me it was urgent."

"As simple as that. But how did you know I was the right one?"

"He accepted the story about the music. And there was no other possible in the phone book. There were your stories of the seashore house. It added up, so I took a chance on it."

Vern's alter ego remarked silently: It is I who am the idiot.

"Altogether you're a great little chance-taker!"

"But I proved to be right."

"You found me, yes. But there are some chances too dangerous to take. Having this child, for instance. Lily, have you given any thought to the predicament such a responsibility will get you into?"

"Yes, I have. That's what I was thinking about when you came up. It's your responsibility, too, and if you're going to let me down, I'm not going to stand for it."

"I've told you I would give you money."

"To get rid of it. But I'm not going to. It's going to live, and what's more I'm going to keep it and care for it. It's going to live wonderfully."

Vern's flesh crept.

"You can't be serious. How can any illegitimate child who isn't adopted live wonderfully?"

"Why should it be illegitimate?" Lily's face was flushed with emotion. "Darling, you can get a divorce. Oh, Vern, I know you love me. Now I understand why you acted the way you did."

He was thunderstruck at her naiveté.

"I couldn't get a divorce, Lily. My wife wouldn't hear of such a thing."

"She would if I went to see her and told her what we mean to each other—and about our child. I've seen her pictures in the papers. She looks a very proud woman."

Vern almost fainted at the prospect of this moving scene.

"Lily, nobody takes such stories to women like my wife. It's the wildest fantasy."

Lily crushed out her cigarette in Enid's gold pin tray with shaking fingers. Her eyes were wide with hurt and bewilderment, but her courage was unflagging.

"What you did was the fantasy, Vern. Now the child is reality. We have to face it, Vern, together."

He made one more try. "Lily, see reason. Let this one go. Trust me and have patience. One short year will make all the difference."

"What difference if your wife will never divorce you? No, Vern, I can't trust you and I haven't any more patience. Of course," she added sadly, "that doesn't mean I won't go on loving you forever."

"If you loved me, Lily, you wouldn't embarrass me with a problem so easy to solve. No, listen, it's nothing, it goes on every day."

"You seem to know a great deal about it."

With an effort he kept from shouting at her.

"I know nothing but the shady rumors. But if you'll keep quiet and see reason I'll find the doctor for you."

"To take my child away?"

"Right, Lily."

She gave him a cold, obstinate look.

"Only from my dead body," she said.

He knew a moment of fury at this ridiculous defeat. Then he moved to his dark, familiar ground. At once he was calm, impersonal, detached from anger.

It wasn't his fault now. He had done his best. She had talked herself to death.

He could even smile kindly.

"All right, Lily. It's your funeral."

She drew back with a shocked look. "That's an awful thing to say."

"It could be, I suppose you know."

"So could your plan, I suppose you know."

Vern yawned and patted his mouth with his hand.

"Get in bed, dear, and I'll tuck you up. I want some rest if you don't. Pretty soon it will be morning."

It was on the way downstairs that the thought struck him that there was advantage in his dire predicament.

The arrows were so old that until they were put to use, their deadliness was just a theory.

He could experiment with Lily.

He halted halfway on the curving staircase so dazzled by the brilliance of the thought that his head seemed full of light.

His heart thundered with excitement. He felt a wild elation as if in anticipation of a wondrous pleasure.

I must be calm, he thought, deliberately stilling the whirlpool of his thoughts before he went on down.

He went in the kitchen to mix another drink, but changed his mind and made a pot of strong black coffee.

There was a pad of market list paper with pencil hanging on the wall. He took it. While the coffee perked he began to clarify Operation Lily in writing so that every problem was solved before getting into it.

There would be no murder charge ever, because there would be no body.

But there might be somebody to raise hell over her disappearance, and she must not be traced to him.

He made the first note, "Taxi-driver."

He would remember a girl in a red storm coat on a windy night, but he would never be questioned.

Unless Lily had confided in somebody before she left New York for Pellingham. But she was the reticent type with her friends. Or was she? She was living alone now her girl friends had gone. She certainly wouldn't tell her landlord.

He would have to question her. He added a query.

He poured out some coffee and sipped it scalding.

The gale had completely blown out. The small hours moved over the lonely house in sea-murmuring silence.

Now who was there to worry over her disappearance? Her father? But she said they were out of touch.

The landlord? He might inform the police, and he might not. It was the end of the month. He would probably shrug his shoulders over the vagaries of girls, store her few personal things in his basement and let her apartment to somebody else.

The people who employed her? He knew nothing about them.

He didn't suppose her work was very necessary to them. Just the same they'd send somebody round to see if she were ill. That would stir up the landlord. Between these

two it was to be expected they would notify her to the police as missing.

What then?

The police would search out and question all her friends.

No doubt he had been vaguely seen at times going in or out. But from his study of the annals of crime, no two witnesses ever agreed on the same description, except of people they knew personally. And even on those, people could know you for ten years and not recall the color of your eyes.

Unless they were like Eva's. Vivid and arresting.

Remembering Eva, he left the table and checked that every door and window was locked. He poured another cup of coffee.

He wrote down, "No letters." Also there was not a scrap of his writing anywhere in the apartment.

Nothing to lead them to him. For he had to accept the fact that it would be fantasy to hope that nobody would report her missing.

But then his research had taught him that so many people went missing in a year that there weren't enough police to cope—unless they gave up everything else for it.

So a lot of people got away with murder.

He wrote down "telephone call." Lily had certainly been inspired in her excuse for it. He did employ a photostat office to make photostats of his scores. Soames was accustomed to their calls.

It proved he hadn't the slightest suspicion or he wouldn't have given the address in Pellingham.

Good old Soames! He'd go to the stake before he would help a strange girl pursue Enid Harrison's husband.

Vern struck that out.

"I can't sleep, Vern. Can I come in and talk to you?"

The soft voice startled him so much that he leaped out of his chair and faced her. She was wearing a fleecy blue robe of Enid's she had found in the closet, and her bare feet made no sound crossing the hall floor.

"Of course. Join me in some coffee and relax."

He turned his notes face down, got a cup and saucer, poured a cup and set it on the other side of the table.

"So you've been thinking, too. Have you changed your mind?"

"No, Vern. But I got lonesome. I thought, why bother? Trying to sleep, I mean. It'll be light pretty soon. Then I'll be getting back to New York."

"To go your rugged way alone?"

Her mouth dropped. "If that's what it has to be."

Adroitly he went after what he wanted to know.

"It's going to be tough. What about your friends? What'll they think of it?"

"I don't have any friends that know anything about me—I mean my private affairs. Your coming in my life turned me away from my folk dance club, things I was doing."

"What about your father?"

"He'd never know. He doesn't even know what I'm at or where I am."

"Like an orphan?"

Tears welled in her eyes. Furiously she raised the back of her hand and dashed them off.

"Sure. But there's nothing unusual about that."

"Wouldn't it make sense to you to do something to avoid more loneliness?"

"You mean you wouldn't come any more?"

"Oh, I might. I think I left something in your apartment."

She gave a wry little laugh. "It was like fate. Your beautiful evening scarf."

It hit him like a fire alarm clanging in his breast.

He could not rid himself of the dreadful problem she represented. His signature was in her house.

Without knowing it, he crumpled the notes under his hand.

"I was sorry to lose it," he said faintly.

"But you haven't lost it, Vern. I brought it with me."

His palms stuck to the paper. They were wet with sweat.

"Always the thoughtful Lily, the good little scout." He smiled at her. "Now you're here why go back before we've had time to settle something?" He got up and went to the grocery cupboard and set a small bottle before her. "Secconal. Take a couple with your coffee. Get a good sleep. Spend the day here at the beach and I'll drive you into Boston tomorrow."

Lily read the label on the bottle. It was his wife's prescription.

"It says one at a time, the second not till four hours after. I'm not used to such things."

"All right, take one. Take the bottle up to bed with you."

Cheered by his change of mood, Lily obeyed.

Incredulous of its truth, Vern reminded her to give him his silk scarf. She opened her dressing case and handed it over.

"Sleep well," he said.

"You too," said Lily.

But Vern had never felt less like sleep in his life. He collected his notes from the kitchen, took them to the living room fire, burned them and mixed the fragments thoroughly with the ashes.

Now he got the package from his bedroom closet. Carefully he pried the dried brown lumps from the gourd, put them in a small iron saucepan with water and simmered it till he had achieved a viscous brown mess like heavy black treacle.

It looked very domestic on the white-and-chromium electric stove.

Vern stared into it almost hypnotized. Could this really be violent and sudden death?

Soon he would find out.

He supposed he ought to feel something. He stood thinking: What do I feel, what do I really feel, about death and about doing this to Lily?

He felt nothing. Then he felt interested, but utterly impersonal.

If this stuff worked as it was supposed to work, it would be irrevocable, once the poison-tipped point had pierced her flesh.

Now he felt something. A mixture of delicious terror, and keen, urgent excitement.

He turned from the stove to get the arrows.

A sliver of cold grey light showed between the warm yellow curtains. Another day.

Lily was asleep when he went up to her, and she did not wake when he entered the room.

He held one of the blow pipe darts which carried its old poison under the new coating he had put on it. For self-protection he was wearing his thick pigskin driving gloves.

Lily was breathing heavily and she did not stir. One hand was curled under her flushed cheek and the other was outflung across the down comfort like a child's.

Nothing could be more ideal for this rehearsal for another death.

Vern breathed slowly, subjugating the tremor of his nerves. His mind went clear and hard as a diamond.

With steady hand and surgical precision, he stabbed her deep in the upturned palm.

Her arm jerked violently and she woke, opening wide, terrified eyes on him.

"You were screaming," he said. "Did you have a nightmare?"

"I was going to be crucified. A man hammered a nail—"

"Does it hurt now?"

"No—"

He lifted the outflung arm and let go. It dropped, relaxed, a dead weight.

It was working. When the blood carried the poison to the breathing muscles, it would relax them, too.

Lily gasped once, but she could not struggle.

Her mouth opened like a dying fish and her face went dark. The light left her eyes. She was already unrecognizable. Vern did not know if she were dead, but he was sure she would be soon. He covered her disfigured face with the sheet and went downstairs.

He felt suddenly tired.

Methodically he scraped the poison into a small jar, cleaned the pot, packed the curios away. When every trace of his night's work had been cleaned up, he got bacon and eggs from the refrigerator and cooked a lavish breakfast.

He ate it slowly to the last morsel, feeling strength and vitality come back. He felt confident that it would be no trouble at all to carry through his plans of disposing of Lily's body.

He wondered why he felt no other emotion.

Again he checked that every door and window was locked against Eva's possible invasion. She would not come after his insulting discouragement. Nevertheless he bolted the door to which Captain Piers kept a key to the lock.

Leaving his breakfast dishes scattered over the table he went upstairs to get on with more important work.

Without the slightest tremor he passed the still body on the bed and went to draw the curtains back from the windows.

He was deluged with the dazzling light. The gulls wheeled out from land after the storm. Otherwise no sign of any living thing.

He was alone with the uncomplaining proof of his achievement.

Achievement? Yes, it is, he thought. Premeditated, swiftly done with expert precision, it deserved the name as much as any other work of art.

He began to feel an enormous expansion of consciousness as he absorbed the panorama of space and light.

Power! Who had more power than the arbiter of life and death?

His back was turned on the dumb corpse which had been but a couple of hours ago a living girl full of love and ambition and anxiety. But he was acutely conscious of its presence.

He began to feel drawn toward it.

He turned round and looked at its outlines, wistful and incongruous under the delicately luxurious covers.

The bare arm still lay outflung with its palm stretched with blood. The head was bent back on its arched throat as if in a paroxysm of pain, but the face was covered with the blue silk sheet. A few strands of hair shimmered like raw silk on the pale blue pillow.

So that was Lily.

I did it, he thought, in a blend of amazement and satisfaction.

Now he went to the bed and took the exposed arm by the wrist and raised it. An incredible change had taken place. It was not quite stiff and not quite cold. But it felt as if nothing else on earth could feel. It felt like death. It emanated the eternal mystery.

He let it drop, limp and heavy. But he went on standing there while wave after wave of ecstasy went through him.

He murmured dreamily to the bright silence, "But I have to get rid of her, and every vestige of everything that belongs to her."

At once he saw a mental picture of the red storm coat on the piano bench downstairs. It would be impossible to burn that so that the homicide magicians couldn't identify its material and texture from its ashes.

There were also her dressing-case with its contents, her shoes, the clothes on the chair over there, the toilet things she had left in the bathroom.

He collected everything methodically, stuffed them in the case, and then recalled the ribbon on her hair and the little white pajamas.

He turned back the blankets without revealing Lily's

face, and removed the pajamas by slitting them with a razor and pulling the pieces away from her.

There was nothing familiar now about her body. When he touched it a weird dark thrill ran through him. The thrill of his new-found power. His mental tangent from good and evil.

He covered her nude body as if he protected a treasure.

When he went down with the bulging nightcase, he was not conscious of the stairs. He had a sensation of floating.

The tough substance of the red coat dismayed him. As he fingered it he looked out the window. The white water running beyond the abandoned lighthouse reminded him of the jagged rocks below the towering cliff. He decided to burn the coat and throw the ashes into the seething water.

He felt powerful again and free. That was the answer.

But not the incinerator. There was an empty oil drum in the garage. He would back out the car to a safe distance, knock holes in the bottom of the drum, set it on some stones from the rockery and burn the things with gasoline.

He found a pair of work gloves in the garage, put them on and went to work out there.

While the drum was cooling sufficiently to handle it he went in the kitchen for a brandy. Standing by the sink he was conscious of the heightening of the light due to the sacrifice of the tree.

He looked out of the window while he sipped from the glass.

A cold, evil smile moved his lips.

How perfect a revenge on women who were fools enough to believe they could thwart his plans.

There the raw broken wound of Enid's crime on his tree, now soft and malleable with the rains, would be the ideal hiding place for Lily.

He refilled his glass and went on sipping slowly, his eyes on the rich waiting earth.

His mind was already at work on rolling the clean white body in the tarpaulin off the boat. Then stitching in sailcloth. Maybe another tarpaulin round that again.

Then she could lie there till the dark nights of spring when the sea was calm.

With two tarpaulins around her it should not be difficult to take her up and put her in the boat and take her out to deep water before the solitude was broken by the summer season.

His smile widened. Too bad Enid could never know how her malicious trick had served him.

Then he went round to the garage, put a newspaper on the floor of the back of the car and lifted in the oil drum.

The smooth getaway of the great car intoxicated him with pleasure. He was in a high, exalted mood as if a drug worked in his veins.

When he reached the high spot which overhung the rocks he scanned the landscape in all directions before taking the drum with its morbid contents out of the car.

He rolled it to the brink and kneeling on the rough brush with his legs round a strong stump, threw it out from him so that it fell clear and reached the angry water. He saw the contents spill apart on the way down.

The newspaper on the floor of the car was smeared with ashes. He gathered it up and gave it to the breeze over the cliff. He heard the distant hum of a car approaching on the highway. He waited, looking out to sea as if enjoying the view, till the car had passed the cliff and dwindled into distance.

Driving home a dim feeling almost like regret clouded his elation. Getting rid of the tangible evidence of Lily's identity was a difficult job which had been accomplished so easily that it lacked the tang of adventure.

He braked on the drive before the garage, got out and hosed the garage floor so that every last grain of evidence was washed with copious water down the hill and into the road.

Then he put the car in and went round the house to let himself in by the front door.

The house was quiet and undisturbed. Confident that all was well, he went up whistling softly. He went through the rooms one by one, leaving Enid's room to the last.

It was just as he had left it. The still body of the interloper lay in Enid's bed, a slender mound under the covers, identified to him by the tawny strands of hair spread on the pillow.

In a few hours Lily would be under the friendly earth. He would mark the place and find a shovel. In its soft condition it should take him little time to dig down where the roots of the tree had been, but it would have to be done under cover of darkness.

He stood looking at the bed, musing on the strange discovery that he felt neither remorse nor apprehension.

Death was a natural thing. Why should it be unnatural to hasten it when another life was threatened by its existence?

Nothing overlooked the room, except perhaps a man with a telescope on the deck of a ship nearing shore.

But he had experience of what such a man could see with a searchlight at night. So he walked across the thick carpet, past the uncaring dead and took the cord to draw the curtains.

A sound outside struck him a stunning blow.

He looked down to see a taxi turn from the sea road up the driveway and climb to the front door.

A tall woman emerged in somber black hat with veil and sumptuous, dark mink coat. His heart plunged. *Enid!*

She took a key from her black alligator handbag. He heard the front door open as he watched the driver get out a suitcase and follow her.

Her high-pitched, carrying voice floated up to him.

"Vern, where are you? I know you're home. Where are you?"

He overcame his shock and inertia in time to stop her

coming to search for him upstairs. He rushed out on the landing.

He put his hand on the stair-rail, leaped down four stairs at a time and reached the hall as she was paying off the taxi-driver.

The man left, pulling the door shut after him.

"Enid," he stammered, "what on earth brought you here?"

She looked at him and he almost swooned with the horror of her presence there.

Her eyes went wide as she looked at him.

"Why Vern, you're ill! What on earth's the matter with you?"

He clutched his hands to the mad flutter in his chest and the heaving nausea in his stomach.

"I don't know," he said brokenly, "maybe a touch of the old malaria."

Enid glanced up the staircase. It was her habit to go straight up, change her things and wash in her bathroom after her journey.

Vern groaned and made for the divan in the living room. The sweat broke out on his forehead and was running down his face.

Enid followed and sat on the divan beside him.

She was more irritated than sympathetic. "You should have phoned me. I would have come at once."

"I'm used to this. It's been a long time, but I know how to deal with it."

"Then how?"

"Rest and quinine. You could drive over. The Cap has got some."

"Ridiculous. I'll phone and he can bring it here. I wouldn't dream of leaving you in this condition. What do you take me for? Besides, with all these things they invent, there must be something much more modern than quinine."

Vern groaned again to vent his anguished hate.

Enid looked at his hands clutched at his stomach.

"Good heavens! I think it's appendicitis. Troubles never come singly. I thought here I'd get a rest, maybe a little understanding. I'll call the doctor, then I'll get you up to bed."

She rose to go to the telephone. He caught her wrist and clung with all his strength.

"Don't leave me! I don't want the old fool. Don't leave me! Wait! In a few minutes I'll be all right."

She sat down again. "I don't think so. I never saw you in such a state. Why, you're shaking all over, your teeth are chattering."

It was shock—and it might serve.

"Then it's only malaria."

"*Only!* So what am I supposed to do about it?"

"Leave me alone for a few days. But first get the quinine from Captain Piers."

"Leave you alone? Are you mad? What would people think if I neglected my responsibility?"

"Then go for the quinine," he said faintly.

Enid tried to release her wrist from his grasp, but she could not.

"Vern, I'm sorry for you, but you don't have to behave like a child. Tell me one good reason why I should go all the way when the old man can bring the stuff to me?"

"Because he's ill himself. Flu. He had a high temperature yesterday."

"Then I'll call the drugstore in Pellingham. They can send something out immediately." She tugged at her wrist. "Let go of me. I want to go upstairs and get some blankets for you."

His hand ached with the tension of his iron grasp on her.

"No—Enid—can't go up there. Octopus waits on the landing, only just escaped him."

"Delirious," she said while he babbled on incoherently. For a minute she made no more attempt to escape. Sat looking at him in helpless bewilderment.

Now if I'd twisted my ankle, Vern thought lucidly, she could have put on a nice Red Cross bandage.

Then his thoughts raced madly round the upper floor of the house, calculating, planning, foreseeing.

There was one immediate necessity.

To clear her room and leave it exactly as she expected to find it, a quilt over the mattress and pillow, the sheets in the linen closet and the blankets and comforter folded in the cedar chest.

There must be no cigarette ashes in any of her precious pin trays.

So where to put Lily?

Enid put her free hand on his damp forehead. "You're perspiring, but you're cold. You must be right about the malaria. Vern, let go, dear. Are you listening to me?"

More time to think!

He muttered softly, "Don-leave-me-don-leave-me-don-leave—"

"Don't worry, baby, I won't leave you." She tugged at her imprisoned hand again. "Oh, God, if I only knew what to do."

There was another interval of priceless silence.

Vern's thoughts pondered one room after another.

There was the servants' quarter shut off by itself at the garage end of the house. Three small bedrooms and a bathroom over the garage and the kitchen.

But Soames might be following, and one of the others.

Any moment another taxi might draw up to disgorge another enemy. Enid had never spent a single night in this house or any other without one.

He thought he heard a car coming up the sea road. He sweated again profusely. But it was on the main highway and it passed, its ominous sound dwindling into distance.

There were the two big bedrooms at the front of the house divided by the big luxurious bathroom. One was Enid's and one was supposed to be his, but he had never slept in it.

He had always slept in his own room at the north-east end of the house.

He could lock his own room if he didn't sleep in it.

But that wasn't safe enough. An amateur would do that. A master of art would leave the door standing open. There was a big closet in his room and it had a Yale lock.

Vern sighed with relief.

With the door standing open so that the room was visible at all times, that would be the perfect place.

If he could only get Enid out of the way for ten precious minutes.

She tugged at her hand again. "Don-leave-me—" he began to mutter.

"I'm not going to leave you," she said, slowly and distinctly as if speaking to a child. "I am going to the telephone to get help. Then I'll get you into bed."

"The octopus is up there—"

"I know, dear, but I won't let it touch you."

Ten minutes, his thoughts hammered, only ten minutes. An inspiration forked through his mind with the blaze of lightning. He rose unsteadily, still holding on to her.

"All right, let's go—"

"Good boy," she was still talking to the child. "Now lean on me."

But he did not lean. He pulled. She went willingly to the staircase, but he did not go up the stairs. He pulled her beyond and into the little passage leading to the garage.

Before Enid had time to resist, he opened the door and pushed her through, slammed the door and pushed home the inside bolt.

"Can' let the octopus get my wife," he shouted like a drunk. "Safe there while I kill him."

He heard her beat her fists on the door and scream, "Vern, Vern, darling, oh, listen to me—"

But he was halfway up the stairs.

Convinced that he was delirious and in danger of hurt-

ing himself, she would find some way of getting into the the house. Her key was in her purse lying on the living room coffee table. She would have to break the window. It would take a little time. All but the great view window in the living room had stout copper screens over them in metal frames.

But Enid was Enid. It might take less than ten minutes.

His heart was beating like a trip-hammer, but his brain was operating at high speed.

The first objective was the concealment of Lily.

If she got in before the rest was accomplished, she would put the usual construction on it.

But that would be a great pity.

He rushed into the room of death, tore off the coverings except the blue sheet, pushed it under Lily and attempted to lift her body.

Its weight and rigidity were so unexpected, he fell over backward, pulling the covering with him.

Rising to make another attempt, he saw Lily's face. Her teeth were exposed in a fiendish grin, her skin was dark, her eyes were bulging and the pupils turned back under the eyelids.

A scream of horror escaped his lips as he flinched from it.

Outside the house somewhere he heard Enid's voice.

"Vern, Vern, darling where are you?"

Frantically he covered the object of horror, rolled it off the bed, stood it up and carrying it against him, got it into his own bedroom.

It was like carrying the trunk of a tree.

He had to lean it in the corner while he found the key of the closet so carefully left locked because of the arrows concealed in it.

His mouth was dry and his face wet with the sweat pouring down it, blurring his eyes as it dripped into his eyelashes.

He shut the door clicking the lock. Tried it. No one could open that. He dropped the key in his grandmother's

old willow pattern teapot standing on the mantelpiece.

He was in the master bedroom, picking up and folding, without knowing how he got there.

Enid was making rattling sounds and knocks somewhere in between her calling.

The blankets were in the cedar chest. He looked at the down comforter in consternation. It had a round patch of blood on it the size of a saucer.

It stopped him dead in his desperate conflict with time. How could he explain the bloodstain?

More blood and fresh blood on this thing would be the answer. He trailed it through the bathroom into the second front bedroom, hastily made up the bed with the things at hand, rolled it in to rumple it and threw the blue cover on it.

Then he went back to Enid's room to clear up the cigarette ashes. It looked neat, bright and innocent.

"I'm locked out, Vern," yelled Enid, her voice high and sharp as a knife. "I'm freezing. Be a good boy. Throw down a key."

A key! He put his hand in his jacket pocket and felt the keys of the Rolls. She bought it. Let her have it.

He went to the bathroom window, opened it, unhooked the screen and threw the key ring out. It landed with a musical clink on the stone paving of the terrace.

A moment later he heard her again shouting "Oh, *no!*"

He relaxed. Everything was done. The damp towels and water spilled in the bathroom were explained by his occupancy of the second bedroom instead of his usual room.

He dashed downstairs, withdrew the bolt on the house door from the garage and dashed upstairs again.

He had a plan to explain that blood.

He went in the bathroom, slashed his wrist lightly with a razor, and drawing the blue stain cover around him, lay on the newly made bed.

His wrist did not bleed very much, but enough to have some disfiguring smears on the cover before Enid gave

up calling, went round to the garage to get the Rolls out to get help, and making one more try at the door she had been ejected from, found she had free access to the house.

He was ready for her when she found him.

"My God, Vern! What have you done?"

"I'm no good," he muttered. "Never been any good. Far better off without me."

"Heavens," she said to herself. "Am I not to be spared *anything*?"

She picked up his injured wrist. "Now stop it, Vern. Don't act like a child. Just a scratch that I can fix."

She went into the bathroom. Returned with a band-aid from the cabinet. Slapped it on to stop the small trickle of blood and wiped around it with a wet cloth.

She was panting from her effort to get in the house, impatient and irritated.

Vern was exhausted, physically and emotionally from his own exertions. He turned his face into the pillow feigning sleep.

He heard Enid's startled gasp.

"Great heavens alive! *My eiderdown!*" It was snatched away from him. "Why couldn't you use the one in this room? It's ruined! And why are you in this room anyway?"

Vern kept a hold on his temper. He seethed with bitterness. Suppose I were ill? Suppose I meant suicide? Is this marriage?

He heard the lid of the cedar chest slam. He winced. Then he was being roughly, but expertly tucked into a rose-colored down cover smelling of cedar.

"Don't get anything on this one. Maybe I'd better put a bandage over that to make sure."

She was already in the bathroom slamming open the cabinet. He let her put the bandage on his wrist.

"You're cold as ice, but your pulse is racing."

She gathered the stained blue down cover from the floor.

"This will have to go to the cleaners. Now Vern, stay put for at least five minutes. I need help. I'm going to call the doctor."

"I won't see him."

"See him or not, I call him. Then it isn't my responsibility."

He turned on his back and opened his eyes. "One moment, Enid."

She stood over the bed, thin and tall in her black dress, her mouth bitter, her sharp nose red with cold.

"Yes, what is it?"

He had been going to ask her if that was all she cared about.

Instead he said, "Be careful of that octopus!"

Her expression changed to doubt and trouble.

"There's something here I don't understand. You have no temperature. You seem rational—"

"So you think I'm rational?"

"Frankly, I do."

"Then why are you trying to push a doctor down my throat when I tell you I know how to handle my problem?"

"I see. Then what do you want?"

"What I asked for in the first place. Quinine."

"Very well. But I confess myself bewildered," she said.

"I'm so tired," he muttered.

She sat on the end of the bed, staring at him as if she were staring into him.

"And my head aches," he added.

"I'll get you some aspirin." She made no move to get it, still searching him with a disconcerting stare. "What I'd like to know is what you're doing in this room. You always said you hated it so much."

Now he was on solid ground.

"How do you think I felt when I waked in the morning and saw nothing but blank sky? My tree had gone."

The tension in her face relaxed.

"Oh, that! Vern, be reasonable for God's sake. It was

nothing personal. The roots were undermining the foundations."

"I'm not complaining. It's your house, Enid, to set fire to, if you like. You asked me to explain my action."

"I see." She relaxed all over and her mouth grew softer. This made sense to her. She knew the tree had meaning for him, was a link with his childhood. "I'm sorry, Vern. But it had to be."

He shivered. "Get me the aspirin, Enid, *please*. My head has hammers in it."

She rose at once, taking the blood-stained cover with her.

Going for his robe and pajamas he heard her at the telephone. She was ordering drugstore supplies which boded a long visit. "Oh, and another thing, Mr. Hambley. Include a bottle of quinine."

Somehow the night passed.

The quinine made his ears ring and gave him the headache he had been feigning.

Enid left him after she stood over him to see the quinine went down, but she left the doors open between his room and hers leading through the bathroom.

So that she would wake immediately if he called on her.

He had managed to dissuade her from calling Soames long distance and telling him to fly to Pellingham with one of the maids on account of the "emergency."

"I'll be all right in twenty-four hours," he had told her. "I'm not even sure that it really is malaria." Then he had been touched with genius. "I have to get back to the work on the piano I came to do. The suffering on Soames's face takes the inspiration out of me."

Enid thought, as she was meant to do, of her own suffering.

"Forget the piano and rest. When you're better I have some serious things to say to you."

Tortured by worry, unused to physical discomforts, he

turned and tossed. He wondered how long she had come to stay.

The implications of a stay beyond a few days were so frightful that he groaned aloud, and sweat broke anew all over his body.

Enid heard, leaped out of bed and in a moment was hovering over him, her thin hand on his wet forehead.

She felt the sheet and his pajamas. Wringing wet.

"Seems you're right. It's malaria."

She found him dry pajamas, changed the sheets and forced another dose of quinine down him.

His headache sharpened in each temple and his ears throbbed with the clang of a boiler factory.

He hardly heard Enid's complaint that one of her blue silk sheets was in the soiled linen basket where it had no right to be, and the other one was absolutely missing.

"What's it matter?" he mumbled.

"It certainly matters if you need dry sheets every few minutes."

Better deal with one problem at a time. The first one to be solved was how to get rid of Enid.

His misery grew to such proportions that he actually contemplated a violent quarrel which would send her back to town in a huff.

But a small, hard core of sanity restrained him.

She would alter her will as she had threatened, and the law about the dower rights was very tricky. Her relatives were enemies who would spend the lot on lawyers to prove he had not been a good husband.

How wonderful if it were Enid, standing rigid and disfigured in her missing blue sheet, waiting his disposition in the closet!

He waited till he heard her breathing change into light intermittent snoring. He got up and slowly, silently closed the bathroom door on his side. Then he put on his robe, lit a cigarette and stood at the window.

He was so thirsty he thought suddenly of at least a quart of black coffee.

He got out of the room without a sound and crept down the thickly carpeted stairs with his slippers in his hand. Shut the kitchen door before he clicked the light in the kitchen.

In half a minute the door flew open and Enid was standing there, tying the sash of a dim grey dressing gown.

"What do you want down here? Why didn't you call me if you wanted something?"

"I wanted coffee," he said mildly, "I didn't want to wake you."

"Sit down," she said. "I'll make it."

He obeyed.

Enid gathered the dishes from the table and took them to the sink one at a time. He could have laughed aloud.

She said suddenly. "Why two coffee cups? One on each side of the table."

"Guess I used a new place because the other was left there."

"With lipstick on the cup?"

He put his elbows on the table and his head in his hands. Enid touched him on the shoulder.

"Vern, who was in here drinking coffee with you?"

"Must have been Eva. She didn't have it with me. I sent her off, so she just left it there."

"Who is Eva?"

Another bitch, he almost said. "Captain Piers's granddaughter. He sent her over to keep the house clean. She got on my nerves, so I sent her packing."

"How typical of you. I shall call her up this morning and tell her to come back. She will be very useful to me. Now what's Captain Piers's telephone number?"

He told her without comment.

Enid telephoned Eva and after she hung up said to Vern, "She sounds a very agreeable girl. To me. You must have been rude to her." She looked round the room. "She'll light the fire here and get our breakfast. She thinks you have flu, picked it up from the old captain."

"So that settles that."

Vern closed his eyes, and there was Lily's dead face again before his eyelids. He had to open them. His heart pounded. Enid was still standing looking at him with a speculative expression. He felt on the verge of screaming. "Get me some strong drink," he said.

The desperation in his voice impressed her. She vanished and returned after a long time with a tray laden with cut glass, silver, ice cubes, soda and the bottle of old brandy.

She left it with him while she went upstairs to have her bath.

Vern listened intently. She did not pause to look in at his room. And if she did, she wouldn't be able to open the closet without asking him for the key.

He opened the brandy, poured out half a tumblerful and gulped it down neat.

It filled him with a gentle fire. He relaxed, turned on his side and went to sleep.

He woke with a hand on his forehead. He heard Eva's voice. "It may have been flu. It certainly isn't malaria. Grandpa used to get it. He hasn't got a temperature. I don't think you need worry, Mrs. Harrison."

"I don't know what to think. He kept soaking the sheets with perspiration yesterday. He can't do that simply through being a neurotic character."

Vern kept his eyes closed. The hand moved away.

"He's sleeping so peacefully."

"Then don't wake him, Eva. Get the fire lit, then start the breakfast. Let me see. Oh yes, I'll be upstairs searching for a sheet that is missing. You can—"

Vern could not control the tremor that ran through him. He opened his eyes and struggled up.

"How do you feel?" inquired Enid.

"Fine, thanks. With a shower and some clothes I'll be as good as new again."

Eva's vivid eyes were on him like twin blue lights, but the look in them was impersonal.

"Oh, good morning, Eva. Nice of you to come to help out."

"Good morning, Mr. Harrison. Cap told me to tell you to take grog every four hours and stay by a fire today."

"Come Eva," said Enid, "he can't stay by a fire till you've lit one."

Enid, now in a somber black dress with a grey shantung housecoat over it, moved off. To Vern's amazement, Eva meekly followed her. He heard their voices from the kitchen. Enid was telling Eva what she wanted done. Apparently she was planning on an indefinite stay. He heard, "Wednesday will do for that. You could drop some things at the cleaners this afternoon. Oh, I must find that good sheet. It's one of the blue silk ones."

And I must get rid of her, thought Vern. Today? Not possible. Tomorrow? His thoughts went up to the body in the closet. How long? He shuddered. He looked out at his ally, the weather. As he did so the first drops of rain spattered the window.

Rain at the beach depressed Enid. If it kept up two days, that would be all she could stand. Of her own volition she would take off for New York.

Two days! His tortured mind reverted to the thing in the closet. Every hour that passed added abomination to the thing he had to do.

He went up to the bathroom in the front to get a shower.

Enid followed him and tapped on the door.

"At least you could use your own bathroom. You know how I hate water slopped on the floor of my bathroom."

"I'll be careful."

"I don't want you to be careful. I want you to use your own things. Your room is warm—I've been in—"

His heart jumped. "What for?"

"To check if the missing sheet was on your bed."

"Me in silk? How ridiculous!"

"You wear silk shirts and pajamas."

"You buy them. If I—"

"Now, Vern, don't start something. Please get out of my bathroom."

"All right! All right! Let me collect my things."

The second day of hell moved at its glacier pace.

An inch in a hundred years, but it seemed slower.

The rain pattered its helpful, but dismally melancholy song. The blown vines scratched at the window. The sea joined with its eternal, mysterious lament.

That night Vern couldn't sleep. He got his warm robe and went downstairs.

The fire was still smoldering behind the night screen. He took it away and rekindled it with twigs and paper, then piled it with two big sea-pine logs from the log box.

The rain hissed on the big pane behind the drapes, and the walls glimmered with the red dance of the flames. This was how he liked it.

He turned the radio softly to a night music station. It blended with the rain, the crackle of the logs, the hoarse muttering of the sea.

There was no sleep in him any more. He felt feverishly ablaze with life.

For one reckless moment he considered trying to get Lily down the stairs and into the car. The wet night provided such desolation and sheltering darkness.

He went to the foot of the stairs and listened.

The slight sound of Enid moving about, a door opening and closing, made his flesh creep. She wasn't asleep. Anyway she slept like a cat, her ears aquiver.

He went back to his seat by the fire and mentally rehearsed his murder plan. Now that he knew the stuff was potent, the only thing that could go wrong was Enid acting out of character.

She never had, so long as he'd known her.

If she did, he'd do it another way. The beauty of the

plan was that if she failed him, there'd be nothing to show he'd ever tried. No near accident, no lucky rescue. •

First there was her habit of waiting up for him in the lounge beyond the foyer in the New York apartment.

Before the fatal night, that habit must be established again without possibility of doubt.

It was a technique of passive resistance, an artful, silent reproach.

She would never admit it was any form of checking on him.

"I like to know you're safe home and have everything you need before you go to bed."

Like one of these broody hens of mothers with their clucking little debutante daughters.

Apart from her unbearable method of sharing her money with him, it was that waiting-up habit which had done more to foster hatred in him than any of the other irritating traits of her dominating personality.

He smiled at the picture in the fire. How well it was going to serve him now.

Among other such activities, she was on the committee of a foundation for the rehabilitation of fallen girls. She presided over a meeting every third Thursday of the month.

She dined at home, went out at half past seven, attended the meeting, went to one of the homes of the other women for talk and a snack supper, arriving home on the stroke of half past eleven.

She would look in Vern's room, find he was still out, go to her room, prepare for the night, put on one of her dim, expensive dressing gowns and take up her station in the chair by the Adams fireplace in the lounge.

She would fall asleep there and her mouth would fall open.

It was his habit to tiptoe past her and leave her there till she woke up.

All the servants knew this, so there was no new habit to

establish to make it plausible that he went past her without discovering she was dead.

It would take place on the third Thursday in April.

She had attended her third Thursday in March and come to Pellingham on Friday. Today was Saturday. He would get her back to New York by Monday if he had to take her there. He would have time to come back—a long shudder went through him—do his work here, stay a few days to recuperate, go back to New York and have all the old routine under way to serve his purpose.

Soames would be his star witness.

He would warn her about the arrows that night while Soames was serving dinner.

“Oh, Enid, I may be out when you come in, so I want to warn you, if you see the arrows old Cap gave me, don’t touch them. I repeat don’t touch them. They are tipped with poison.”

And just to be sure Soames was paying attention instead of concentrating on carving the roast, he would include him.

“And that goes for you, too, Soames. If you see those arrows about, don’t handle them. They’re lethal.”

Soames would say loftily, “Very good, sir.”

Enid might say anything. But it would mean only one thing. Her objection to the gruesome objects being introduced to her household. In this case her objection would be logical. She would argue all through dinner till she looked at her diamond wrist watch on her bony wrist and said, “Heavens! Soames, call my taxi!”

They had three cars, counting the Rolls, running up garage fees in New York, but it was less trouble to take a taxi.

Before Vern’s advent, Enid had had a chauffeur. Vern was supposed to take his place because it was more “companionable.” But Vern was a greater master than Enid in the art of passive resistance.

Now that argument! He smiled at a new thought. He would warn her about the arrows at the beginning of

dinner, so that there would be time for the argument to make Enid unpleasant.

What he did later could then be explained, not as a desire to add a harsh note to the over-civilized decor of the apartment, but as a sort of retaliation, a grim practical joke on her.

That would make solid sense to the medical examiner when he called to investigate her fantastic way of death. He couldn't be in such a job without acquiring an X-ray insight into human nature.

If things went as usual, when Enid returned that night all the staff would be in bed.

The first thing she would see on entering the lounge would be the row of shrunken beads leering from the Adams mantelpiece. She would be furiously angry. She would search for Vern and he would not be there.

She would stand on the chair and strip the arrows from the wall above the heads, and throw the lot into the big leather waste basket.

Then she would settle in the chair fuming with rage, and wait up for him. She would go to sleep.

The elevator boy would see her through the foyer when he rolled the door open. Another witness.

Vern's heart began to thud with suspense as if he were actually about to commit the crime on which his future as a free, and wealthy, man depended.

The elevator door would roll shut behind him.

He would advance noiselessly into the lounge. It would be softly lamplit, warm and quiet.

He would stand before her sleeping figure slumped in the chair.

He would put his hand in his pocket and draw out the keen lethal point, renewed, with which he had killed Lily.

He would put his other hand over her mouth in case she woke at the stab and screamed.

He would turn her hand over and stab her finger tip. He would hold her mouth till it was all over.

It was a nerve paralysis that spread like the flames of brush fire all over the body.

If Soames should appear, he would say, "Help—quick! Look what she's done with the arrows!"

If she hadn't touched the arrows, he would kill her first and himself throw them in the waste basket afterwards.

He suddenly felt drained and exhausted as if the whole thing had actually happened.

And he was safe on the other side with the grave Soames telling the medical examiner he had heard Mr. Harrison tell Mrs. Harrison to be careful, the arrows were tipped with poison.

But he wasn't safe. He was in horrible danger.

And he was so tired in his head and in his limbs he needed twelve hours' sleep, and he felt as if sleep had deserted him forever. He drank some brandy and went upstairs to bed.

Enid was up before eight. To rise the moment she woke was another of her habits. Nor had she any patience with others who indulged in late lying abed in a state of dreaminess or languor.

She had news for Vern when she came downstairs.

He was temporarily almost comfortable. He had drawn the drapes back, got himself some coffee and the smartly blazing logs were combating the melancholy of the wet grey daylight.

"What do you think, Vern? I've located the blue silk sheet that was missing!"

His heart plunged, his stomach dropped, his limbs twitched as if his body were jerked by lightning.

His mind came second. If she really had, she wouldn't be so pleased and calm about it.

"Where?" he asked her.

"In your bedroom closet. There's a corner sticking out on the floor. I've tried every key I can find, but nothing fits."

He was speechless. He had almost stopped breathing.

"So surely you have one, Vern. Get it for me. So that's

how old Annie dealt with the soiled linen. Servants! One you can trust to do things right when your back is turned, that's one in a million."

Vern was collecting himself. But slowly. The picture of Enid opening the door and Lily falling on her had struck him with physical agony. He could understand shock killing a healthy man.

"Don't stare at me as if I were lying. Why, Vern, I bet your closet hides one big pile of dirty linen."

"Could be, if what you say is right. Let me drink this while it's hot and I'll go up and look myself."

"You needn't. Just loan me the key, that's all."

"I'll have to search for it."

"Then don't bother. You used to keep it in the teapot. I didn't think to take a look."

The coldness of the shock was overcome by the heat of devastating anger.

"Snooping! I hate it. Not because I have anything to hide. It's the principle of the thing. Now you stay here while I go up and look for the key to that closet."

"Why keep it locked at all? The contents are very private, no doubt."

"If that's how you feel, drop your pretensions of being a lady, and breathe down my neck while I open it."

Her face went dead white and seemed to shrivel. Her mouth trembled. Then she braced herself.

"Forget the sheet. It's your closet. Keep it locked on the dirty linen. If you don't mind it in your room, why should I? In fact, I did notice a queer odor come to think of it."

Vern left her and went upstairs.

He knew her. After his insult he could leave his door wide open and she would not follow.

But he closed it. There was a lock, but no key. He put a chair against it with the back tipped under the door handle.

Then he got the key out of the antique teapot, inserted it in the lock of the closet and stood there thinking.

I must prepare, he thought. I must be ready for anything.

As he stood he caught a faint whiff of the inimitable smell of physical corruption.

It was so faint it eluded him, but it was enough to sicken him. He looked down. From under the door a mere inch of the pale blue corner protruded.

Far away in the house the telephone bell rang faintly.

He must hurry. If someone were asking for him she would come upstairs and find the door barricaded.

He opened the closet door a few inches, put his hand in, caught the sheet and tugged at it. He felt the rigid resistance. Then the weight fell against the door and still he tugged. There was the sound of tearing, and suddenly it was free and he could pull it through and gather it up in his two hands.

He pushed the door shut again and pocketed the key.

Enid was standing in the hall by the telephone when he went down. She looked nonplussed.

"Eva can't come any more," she said abruptly. "The old man is in bed with a relapse of his flu. She says she can't leave him, so please will I ask the agency to send me someone."

"Too bad," he said insincerely. "And today is Sunday." He held out the sheet. "That's all there was."

Enid saw the tear at once. "Oh, that accounts for it. Don't confess and get it over. Hide it. That's the servant class. Cowards. No breeding. Then they prattle about equality."

Vern was weak with shock. He had been in danger and was out of it. He was grateful.

"Don't worry. While you're here I'll fetch and carry for you."

She turned and looked out the hall window at the driving rain. Her eyes swam with tears which she fiercely blinked away.

"Thank you, Vern. But I'd much rather you shut up the house and drove me back to New York."

The rain was coming in solid sheets making the roads slick, but the great car held them like a locomotive. The new tires bit into the wet surface giving a feeling of security. The interior was dry and warm and safe.

Enid sat huddled in her corner, her drooping black felt hat meeting the collar of her rich mink coat. Her long feet, showing narrow black shoes below birdlike ankles, were crossed in front of her.

Vern drove fast regardless of the storm.

Today was Sunday. With luck he could get back to Pellingham by Wednesday morning or Wednesday night. His stomach heaved at the thought of the ordeal that awaited him. What would it be like on Wednesday? It was growing more nauseating by the minute.

Enid could not maintain her silence. She was nervously watching the speedometer.

"A *little* slower. Oh, please, Vern."

He slowed down. It was infuriating. Every cell in his body was racing to get there fast. Besides, she had bought him the car—now she wouldn't let him enjoy it. She was never any good at enjoying live, youthful experience. No companion whatever. Yet she wanted one.

The highway by-passed the village of Sandwich, but Enid came to life and expressed a wish to go through it, also to get out and walk.

"The shops are closed," he said. "Sunday, remember?"

"If I see some glass I want, I can take a note and send for it."

He sat fuming in the car while she window-shopped. By the time she returned prattling of golden ruby and lace glass he was ready to choke her then and there with his bare hands.

He drove like mad on the open highway.

"Vern, I forbid this!"

God, what a woman! He wondered how Eva would respond to the magnificence of the car. She would probably want to drive it.

Eva! He suddenly remembered that Enid had told her to clean the house after they had gone.

He braked gradually, pulled the car to the side and stopped.

"Something wrong, Vern?"

"Not with the car. That old pain in my stomach."

He got out in the rain, walked into a grove of dripping pines and was violently sick.

When he returned, Enid produced a pocket flask of brandy from the first-aid kit. He drank some straight from the bottle.

He sat in the driving seat with eyes closed, aware she was watching him. He pondered his new problem.

He recalled she had told Eva there was no hurry.

"Tuesday or Wednesday will do, Eva. Wait till the old man's better." Then she gave Eva the New York number. "If you need me, call me collect."

No closet door would conceal what would reveal itself to Eva if she didn't enter the warm closed house until Wednesday—even Tuesday.

He had to get right back immediately.

"Feeling better, Vern?"

"No. Terrible. You'll have to take over if you want to drive all the way to New York."

"But you know how I hate driving. And in this awful rain, and a strange new car!"

Hysteria was in her voice as if she had endured too much and this was the end of everything.

"But you're so competent in emergencies. The car is easy. Change over and try it."

"No—no—no—"

"Then what do you suggest?"

"Call the nearest Auto Club agent and ask for a man to drive us."

His hatred was a towering flame. "Then how would I get back to Pellingham? I'd have to hang around town wasting time till I was equal to the long drive back again."

"You mean you want to go back to the beach? Alone? In that condition?"

"Of course. I haven't finished my concerto. That's what I went for. You don't like my noises."

"I give up," she said.

"Give up what, Enid?"

Her thin face was flushed and she looked angry, not concerned or sympathetic. "Oh, never mind. Let's be practical. If we stopped at the next roadhouse for a rest, could you get me into Boston?"

He waited. As if pondering. As if he were not pleased and eager.

"You mean you'll go on alone from there?"

"It seems indicated," she said wearily. "You could drive me to the station and see if there's a suitable train. If not, I'll stay with my sister overnight. You return to that nightmare of rain, sea and desolation and finish what you want to do. Then your mind will be at peace when you come back to me."

"How right you are, Enid."

He started up the car and moved back to the highway.

"I should have known better than follow you expecting sympathy or understanding. These are the qualities of maturity."

He made no retort. His hands were trembling. His heart was shaking. His stomach was quivering. Even his mind was tottering.

He was as sick as a man walking a high wire over an abyss buffeted by some supernatural wind.

But a deadly danger had been removed from him. After a few singing miles the magnificent car relaxed him. He felt as much himself as he was likely to feel till his immediate ordeal was over.

After the brief rest and hot black coffee, he took the road for Boston and drove as in a dream. Buzzard's Bay, Wareham, Middleborough, Bridgewater, Brockton, Randolph, Braintree, Milton, the grey buildings, the smoky pall, the streaming streets.

Luck was with him. A train left in fifteen minutes for New York. He remained on the platform till it pulled out.

"Go to a hotel now and sleep," Enid advised him. "Don't try to get back tonight."

He promised that he would.

The rain was thinning and the sky lightening as he left the outskirts of the city. The open roads were almost empty. Singing to himself, he gave the wonderful car the gas.

Vern was a superb driver. As usual, the high speeds and the hazards he took, relaxed and calmed him.

It was dark as he drove into the beach-house garage. He got out, stretched like a cat, rolled down the garage door, locked it from the inside and went into the house.

It was dark and silent.

He stood in the passage feeling for the switch. A wave of almost ungovernable terror rolled over him.

He wanted to rush out into the clean salt air and never go back.

Coming in from the fresh rain-washed night, the odor in the house met him like a warm breath from the door of Hades.

Shaking fingers found the switch and the light was company.

He was light-headed from hunger, but he had only one thought in his mind. To consign his dead without further delay to the cold embrace of Mother Earth.

What first? He decided to dig the grave while he had the cover of darkness. He could do anything he liked in the secrecy of the house while the moon was shining. There would be another hour or so of darkness when the moon went down.

He found his old fishing waders and waterproof pants, picked up work gloves and flashlight in the garage and went out to the tool-shed in the garden. It was protected by a heavy padlock.

Twenty precious minutes of darkness were wasted, and he was weak and sweating when he had pried the padlock open. Fortunately a choice of spades and shovels was available.

He chose a triangular pointed one that would cut deep. In spite of the looseness and wet softness of the ground it was heavy labor.

Now and then he straightened up to ease his back, but it grew more and more difficult to straighten.

His hands burned, the back of his neck ached, his spine felt as if it were dislocated in the lumbar region, sweat ran into his eyes and breathing began to hurt him.

Yet the long narrow bed he was preparing was only knee-deep as he stood in it.

The trouble women made for him! No more women, he decided, as he cursed the fatal stupidity of Lily.

When it was waist deep he decided it would have to do.

He went to the house through the kitchen door, pulled the mud-caked waders off at the top step and left them there.

Now his head was aching under a tight band of pressure.

But his work was only begun. The tarpaulins were in the garage, but he'd have to cross the dunes to the boat-house to get the sailcloth.

He pulled himself together and trudged wearily to the boat house.

Returning, he noted the front windows were undraped. He forced himself into the hall, refrained from lighting the lamps, collected the tarpaulin with the sailcloth and sat on the bottom of the stairs.

Before ascending, he waited till his heart beat more evenly.

He longed for help, for some unholy partnership. He wasn't the type for violence. Subtlety was his metier. Had he realized what unpremeditated murder involved, he doubted he would have undertaken its revolting aftermath.

He recalled how dreadful her face had looked in the process of dying. Now it would be even more hideous.

Before he opened that door he must be prepared for her body to fall on him.

Suddenly the telephone rang, the sound going through him like a red-hot wire. He sat with his heart jumping while it screamed and screamed in the lonely house.

It couldn't be Enid. Whoever else it was had better not know he was there. Or was it better they did. He grew confused. After seven more rings, the party stopped trying.

He got up and forced himself to ascend into darkness up the stairs.

He had got accustomed to the odor of decay so that it had stopped registering. But he got another wave of it when he reached the landing.

Why so soon, he thought, standing still. I didn't know. But the house is warm. But only two—or was it three—days.

He clung to the stair-rail gathering courage to go into his room.

Suddenly he was no longer conscious of the perfume of death. He was conscious only of the thing waiting to embrace him in the pregnant darkness.

I can't touch her, he thought, I simply can't do it.

There was a dim friendly glow downstairs from the little back passage.

He ran down, leaping four stairs at a time. Went in the kitchen and poured some more brandy.

I've got to do it, he thought, and right away. *I've got to do it.*

He pulled drapes and blinds over all the windows and lit all the lights.

This time he went upstairs and into his room without pausing, drew the drapes closed, turned on the lights and unlocked the door of the closet. Then he held up the tarpaulin, opened the door a little and put his hands inside.

The deadly coldness of the contact with what had once been warm, loving Lily kindled a strange terror of outer space. Terror of that solitude beyond imagining.

Against the protest of every shrieking cell in his body he took the rigid weight in his arms.

He lowered it to the floor. It was impossible to straighten out her arms. They might have been molded in iron. He worked with his face averted, but he was conscious of the disfigurement and bluish leadenness of her face. Of the sickening odor.

He dropped the tarpaulin over her. Then laid the sailcloth on the floor beside the body and tipped it over. His hands were shaking so that he could hardly control them. What a fix to get into! What a chore to bring on himself!

Clumsily he folded the tarpaulin in, drew the sailcloth around and began to stitch it. When he was finished he sat on the floor to rest, sweating at the very thought of ever having to handle the problem again.

A sound from downstairs struck him in the chest like a knockout blow.

The front door chimes!

For a moment he sat shocked, gasping for breath. Then self-preservation dictated the nonchalant action. Anything to keep whoever it was from prowling round the house to examine it and stumble into the grave waiting in the garden.

He got up and hurried through Enid's bedroom and threw up the window.

"What is it? Who is it?"

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Harrison. I saw a light showing. Thought I'd better check you weren't gone after all before I investigated."

It was a highway patrolman from Pellingham.

"Thanks, officer. You boys seem to know everything. Nice to know the property is so well protected."

"We try," said the man, pleased and modest. "Not that

anything much ever happens around here. Good night, sir."

Vern watched him go round the winding drive on his motorcycle and then watched his lights melt into the darkness of the highway.

He had hardly enough strength to pull down the window. He wanted to drop on the floor and fall asleep where he lay. With a great effort he returned to his task. Getting his burden down the stairs and through the kitchen into the garden was something accomplished in a nightmare.

He had to lay it down while he pulled on the waders. Then he dragged it to the hole in the garden. He was crying with rage and weakness as he filled in the earth.

It would have been so much easier to go right out in the boat to the deep water, but the roar of the breakers along the shore was getting louder.

Also the wind was rising again. The clouds were racing before it, and suddenly they were blown clear of the ascending moon.

He was beating down the earth when he was suddenly exposed in its unearthly white light.

He staggered up the kitchen steps and into the cover of the house, taking the shovel with him.

He barred the door behind him, took off the waders, sat at the table and put his head down on his arms.

His legs felt like lead, and there was not a square inch that did not ache on his body.

His head had the light unstable feeling of high fever.

He needed food. He had no appetite for it, but he needed it. He would drink a carton of milk.

For a moment he stared into the empty refrigerator in complete astonishment, his mind numb and blank. Then he remembered all the food was still in the back of the car where he had stowed it to please Enid.

Some of it would spoil if he didn't bring it in.

He slammed the refrigerator shut. To hell with it.

What now? Sleep? A hot shower, clean pajamas and a clean comfortable bed?

No. Might as well peel off the waterproof pants and berth on the divan. He had to go out and make the garden look as innocent as possible in the morning.

He got his grandmother's afghan out of the cedar chest in the hall closet and, leaving the house filled with light, settled wearily on the divan with what was left of the brandy.

He woke with a feeling of dread that almost annihilated his physical discomfort. But that was considerable.

He sat up stiffly stretching his arms against the pain in his neck and shoulders. He noted his hands were stiff and the knuckles swollen. His beloved hands which should be fluid and whipcord to speak his mind on the piano.

Rage gave him a shot of energy. He slid off the divan and stood up, at once stabbed by the pain in his back.

He went to the kitchen window without pausing to turn off the lights.

In the grey cloudy daylight the garden looked as though an army had trampled it. His footprints were deep in the soggy ground. There were muddy prints on the brick path and the kitchen steps.

Lily occupied space where earth had lain before, so there was a casket-shaped mound over the location of her body.

He stared at it in speechless horror of the sordid chore she had forced on him. The grave had been too narrow for her rigid outbent arms so he had had to lay her in at an angle.

Rigor mortis. Was it temporary or did it continue?

He began to shiver, although the house was at summer heat with the automatic thermostat.

What he needed was some scalding coffee.

He found a fresh unopened can in a cupboard and got to work on it.

Then he put on his waterproof pants, his fishing boots

and the work gloves, and went out to find a rake and erase the damning eloquence of the garden.

It was twelve noon when he had finished, but it was a thorough job. Tools cleaned and put away, new padlock on the tool-shed, paths and steps hosed clean, even his fishing boots washed and stowed.

Feeling as if his joints had been sprung on a rack, he limped upstairs and drew a tubful of hot water in the big front bathroom.

The telephone rang while he was soaking, but he didn't care who it was. Failing a reply they could call and check if he were in or out, dead or alive. They would find nothing more suspicious than the owner—the owner's husband—in residence.

Now, impeccably groomed and dressed, he began to recover both physically and mentally from his grueling experience.

He felt no hunger, but he felt the need for food. He went out to the garage and restored to the refrigerator everything but the milk that had been left in the car. But he did not fancy any of the food, or perhaps he was tired of working like a laborer. He decided to go out in the car, maybe stop in Pellingham for lunch.

With the lively wheel in his hands and the Rolls skimming the highway with soundless speed, he felt almost himself again.

The sun was sinking and the house full of dusk when he got home. He had shopped for fresh food and he took the packages into the kitchen.

His heart jumped when he saw the note. Or rather his little red leather book lying open.

He looked down at it in disbelief and there was the fluttering in his chest and his stomach tingled with the old, frightened feeling.

It was open at the back and a message written in it in soft black lead.

Dear Vern, Cap is better so I was in to pick up the bundles your wife left for laundry and cleaners. I took this battered relic from the pocket of your coat before handing it over.

Phone rang while I was in—thought better not answer it. Sergeant Lewis told us you were back, alone. Cap says why not join us for supper? I say get back to that concerto.

Yours without love, Eva.

He stood with his grocery packages forgotten in his arms as if frozen to the ground.

Lily had written her name in that sinister book—now she was dead.

But that wild thought was pure superstition. The utter degeneration of the intellect.

Besides his name was in it now. And he was safe. Nothing could save Enid. And nothing could happen to Eva.

He set down his burden, picked up the book of doom, went into the living room and crouched before the fire to kindle it.

He was about to tear out Eva's page, but he had a better thought. The book had tried and condemned Enid. She was as good as dead. Why not now give it to the flames?

He crouched there waiting for the logs to catch. Then resolution failed him.

The book was warm and solid in his hands reminding him of its strange comfort. It had become a part of himself. He couldn't destroy it.

Forgetting his intention to eat, he left the hearth and went to the piano. There was a pencil on the music rack. Smiling faintly he wrote under Eva's note, "Stay as wise as you are. Death is the lot of women who love me."

He dropped it on the end of the keyboard, laid his hands idolatrously on the keys.

But his magic hands were stiff, the fingers inflexible. He worked an hour on the Beethoven concerto to flex

his hands. The piano began to sing. The muse came back and creation flowed freely.

The fire sank to a dull glow, leaving the room in ruddy darkness.

Upstairs a window banged in the wind.

There was a sound like a drawer shutting overhead and sounds like footfalls in the kitchen.

He stopped playing and listened. He thought he heard breathing behind him. His hair crawled on his scalp and his spine felt the trickle of ice water.

He got himself a drink. The kitchen window was a black slab of darkness. Out there was Lily. Suppose a luminous white face were to form there in the dark? Such things had happened.

Better to put up with some of Eva's impudence than stay alone while his mind played tricks on him. Tomorrow he would be more rested and better adjusted.

Should he or shouldn't he?

Finally he got the car out and drove over to call on Captain Piers and Eva. The captain was up and looking hearty. They were just about to sit down to their supper.

"Boiled New England dinner," said the old man proudly. "Won't you eat with us?"

He was glad to.

"Thought you had a relapse, Cap. Quick recovery."

Eva laughed. "It was a good alibi," she said shamelessly. "I couldn't take another day of your wife. I had satisfied my curiosity."

"So that's why you came?"

"Naturally. Can you think of another reason?"

"Frankly, no. It had me guessing."

"What ails ye, Vern?" said the old man suddenly. "Never saw such a scowl on your face."

Vern forced a laugh. "Oh, sorry. Enid went home because she was depressed with the weather. Moaned about it all the time. Depressed me. What about letting me spend the night on your parlor sofa?"

"The house is yours, Vern. Do—"

"That knobby old thing!" cried Eva. "And too short to stretch out. There's the spare room upstairs. I can make up the bed in a jiffy."

"Do that, Eva," said the hospitable old man. He looked at Vern with genuine love. "Like old times when you were my boy. Glad you want to stay, Vern. Warms me old heart."

Vern woke early to the prolonged ringing of the telephone. He heard Eva open her door and run downstairs. In two minutes she was up again knocking on his door.

"Come on in, Eva."

She entered in a blue terry bathrobe, her hair tousled from sleep. She sat on the end of his bed.

"Your wife, Vern. She's been calling your house and getting no answer. She's worried because she figured you'd be back last night. I told her I'd drive over later and check. That we saw you last night and you seemed okay yesterday."

"Thanks, Eva. You saved a lot of argument."

Then her vivid eyes became personal, and the air was charged with sultry feeling.

"Why do men do such things? Why do you waste yourself?"

He was taken aback by her reckless candor. All right, let her have it. She asked for it.

"Because I'm a heel, Eva. As you must have figured out. I like freedom and I don't like work—that is, the kind of work I'd have to do. I married her for her money."

He looked her straight in the eyes, and hers wavered to the bottled ships on the little blue dresser.

"It was unforgiveable. I shouldn't have said that."

"You're wrong. I forgive you. Further, I like you for being honest. I know where I am with you."

She slid off the end of the bed and went out the door, leaving Vern speechless.

When he returned to his house, Vern was quite happy. He put through a call to Enid. Soames answered with

the news that Madame was out to lunch and had left no message.

Vern hung up, relieved. He had been spared a talk with Enid and he had reported. That took care of everything.

Vern enjoyed wandering around all day, but that night he was stricken with loneliness.

It was not a physical craving for the contact of flesh.

It was a deep and dreadful emptiness of the spirit.

He decided to go for a walk.

He got his leather jacket from the hall closet, ran from the house down the rock garden steps, along the path through the dunes and out on to the hard whitely shining beach.

He kept a foot away from the foam line and walked south.

Far away in the white light he saw a single figure walking toward him.

It looked like a lean youth, but as it drew near he saw the long black hair floating about a girl's shoulders.

It was Eva.

She was wearing slim dark slacks and a thick white turtle neck sweater.

He quickened his pace and so did she, and in a few minutes they were standing together.

He took her hand. "Your hands are cold."

"They'll warm in my pockets. I'm warm all over."

He did not want to put his arm about her, but he was impelled to do it. He put it round her shoulders. The loneliness went deeper down—to lie in wait.

"Married man," she said.

"Legally, yes. Actually, no. Couldn't we forget it for just one evening?"

"Why not forget it altogether? I mean, why don't you ask her for a divorce?"

"I have discussed it. My wife would never set me free."

"That's a bleak outlook—I mean for any girl who

forgets it for one evening—and then remembers the rest of her life.”

“There are no such girls, Eva.”

“Oh yes there are. The world is full of neurotics. I’m not one of them.”

She turned southward toward home and began to walk. His arm slipped to her waist. She let it remain there, walked in step with him, their lean young thighs touching. Her warmth went through him. He wondered what she was thinking.

“Eva, have you ever thought of marriage?”

“For me? Don’t think I’d be good at it. I want to see things. Go places. I want a little boat—a ketch would do—poke round the Florida coast, islands through the Caribbean.”

“We could swing a schooner.”

“We?”

“No harm in dreaming, is there?”

“Oh, it’s a game? We could search for treasure. It’s like fishing. Makes it exciting even if you don’t catch them.”

She stood still. They were near her house. The old man had apparently not waked and missed her. No light was showing.

“Better go in, I guess.”

“Tired?”

“Not in the least. Nights like this I could walk forever.”

“Then walk back with me. I’ll get the car out and drive you home.”

She looked at the sleeping house, then at Vern, then at the glamorous splendor of the moon-drenched sea.

“It’s a deal,” she said.

She put her hand in his, and they walked back hand in hand like two children.

But Vern’s mood darkened as he neared his house. It was back with him, the need for company, the prospect of his new terror.

"You're not listening," Eva shouted. "What are you thinking of?"

"You," he said involuntarily.

"What about me?"

"Wishing I could have you for company."

"When? Tonight?"

"Yes. And forever and ever."

She stood still in her tracks.

"Vern Harrison, you can't be serious."

"I can, Eva, and I am."

"But it's fantastic. Why start something you know you can't finish?"

"But I could, if it turned out real. Eva, I could get free if I sacrificed the money."

"But would you do it?"

"Yes, if it turned out real."

"This is frightening. I can't believe in anything that goes so fast."

The house looked formidable to him as they drew nearer. The prospect of its loneliness woke a keen pain. If he couldn't persuade her to go in with him he would sleep in the car, or walk the beach all night.

"Then we'll slow it down. Instead I will play for you."

"You mean now?"

"Why not?"

She followed him up the steps through the rock garden and stood while he put the key in the lock. Then he took her hand and drew her in.

It was warm in the house. Eva sniffed as he closed the door on the pure air. "There's an odd smell upstairs. When I was in for the cleaning I tried to locate it."

"I can't smell anything, except the logs, and the wax polish."

"It's gone now. I only bothered about it because it gave me a funny feeling, one of those scared feelings like a premonition."

He went into the living room and started switching on the lamps. She followed and pulled off her thick white

sweater while he crouched at the hearth coaxing a blaze from the fire.

Under the sweater was a thin white silk shirt with a black monogram on the breast pocket.

She curled in a corner of the big divan, reached for cigarettes from the coffee table and looked up at the dark beamed ceiling.

Vern turned out all but one of the lamps when he began to play.

He played for more than an hour. When he finished Eva had gone to sleep in the divan. He didn't know how much she had heard of it.

He turned off the remaining lamp and sat beside her in the firelight. Then he waked her.

"It was wonderful," she said, "I went on listening in my dreams."

"My sweet liar!"

Eva jumped up, hotly angry. "Never call me that. I hate and abominate a liar."

Vern seized her hand and drew her back. "Calm down. It was a figure of speech, same as yours." He quickly bypassed the problem. "Me for a concert pianist! I drive my wife crazy and I put my girl to sleep."

"How can you speak of your wife and your girl in the same sentence?"

She released her hand, took her sweater from the back of the divan and began to draw it on.

But there were more dark hours to the night.

He had to have Eva or he would go mad with the dark new pain that was growing in him. A pain worse than fear. The pain of intolerable inner loneliness, the solitude of a man who was not good company for himself.

He took the sweater away from her.

"Not yet, Eva. We have to get things straight. You take jokes too seriously."

"They're not jokes. And it's better you know right now that I do take things seriously. If I were your girl, as you put it, I'd be in it over my head, for better, for worse,

for richer, for poorer, till death did us part. Marriage or no marriage. Wife or no wife."

"I never met a girl like you, Eva."

"There are plenty knocking around. It's still a good world. I thought your wife was the type till I saw how she killed the music in you."

She tried to get her sweater back.

"What's the hurry? Will the old man be angry if he finds you're not home?"

"No. He trusts me. He wouldn't worry about me being out, even all night. He knows I walk in the night. He was only worrying that falling for you would hurt me."

"Eva, please fall for me, and I won't hurt you."

"You can't fall for a man and not be hurt. Not my type. I'm the kind that sticks through all, goes to the gallows with him if necessary."

A log broke and fell in the sudden shocked silence.

Eva laughed softly. "How dramatic can you get? Or melodramatic? Sorry, Vern. You see, I'm hurt already. I have fallen for you."

He tossed her sweater on the floor and took her in his arms.

"But what have I done to hurt you?"

"Got married without waiting for me."

"I'll undo that as soon as possible."

"You mean that?"

"Definitely. I'll make a promise. This time next year we'll be in this house, and you the mistress of it."

"I don't care about the house—"

He silenced her with kisses.

Took her to the divan where Eva kissed him back with mounting passion.

But she would allow nothing else.

"Not till you're free, Vern."

The telephone screamed through the hollow stillness of the outer hall.

They drew apart, startled violently.

"What an hour to call! Why should I answer it?"

"Hurry," said Eva. "It might be an emergency."

Vern went, a feeling of foreboding like a chill in his bones. The operator said, "New York calling."

Then Enid's mournful voice. "At last. I thought I would never get you."

"I've been in for hours, Enid."

"I know, Vern. But I had given up for the day. Now I can't sleep. I thought I might at least have peace of mind if I told you what I had been thinking."

He sighed with resignation. Sat down in the telephone chair and relaxed for a long siege.

"Go ahead, Enid. What have you been thinking?"

Her next remark electrified him.

"How wrong I've been. You know, Vern, what cannot work cannot be made to work. I have decided to set you free."

"Wha-at?"

"I knew you'd be shocked. But listen. I have thought of nothing else since I left you on the platform at Boston. I've had time to get used to the idea. Now it's your turn to get used to it. Will you please listen?"

"Yes, Enid. I won't comment till you've had your say."

"First of all, I put two and two together and it refused to make five. You weren't as ill as you pretended to be. What was your motive? You wanted to be left alone in your precious house. I came longing for the sympathy and companionship due to a good wife. What did I get?"

"Enid—"

"Wait. I got absolutely nothing. My fault, not yours. For I knew before I came there was nothing there. Nothing for me, that is. Whether there's something for somebody else, I wouldn't know. Nor do I now care—"

"Enid, *please*."

"Quiet. Don't make me lose my patience. Nothing you can say now will alter what I've figured out. It's this—"

"But, Enid—"

"Don't interrupt. Listen."

He relaxed, exasperated. "Go ahead. I'm listening."

"I have many years left of comparative youth. If I divorce you I'll get Aunt Sophie's money. Even after taxes that's a considerable fortune. I would want help to handle it, and why shouldn't I have also the affection and companionship of a worthwhile man?" Her voice broke on a sound like a sob. She controlled it. "So why should I waste another day of my life pampering a conceited, empty ingrate like you? Answer that if you like."

Vern held his hand on the flutter in his chest. He said unequivocally, "I agree. You are absolutely right."

There was a pause as if she were astonished.

"Then that settles it. I shall use this period of mourning which frees me from social obligations to go to Florida, or the Virgin Islands. My attorney will see that it is valid in the State of New York. Any objections, state them now."

"None whatever. Whatever you plan is right with me."

"Thank you at last for something. You probably feel you've earned it, so I'm going to make a settlement on you. That house you set such store by—I never want to set foot in it again—a block of shares and capital investments that'll give you ten thousand a year for the rest of your life."

"*This house? Mine? You can't mean that?*"

His heart was thumping so hard he could barely articulate.

"For heaven's sake! Are you crazy? I'm telling you you're going to be independent, able to sit and compose till you drop dead, and all you think of is the house."

"It's too much to take in," he stammered. His mind was on the secret in the garden. He could leave it there. He would never have to go through the ordeal of taking it up and getting it to the boat and loading it with stones and sinking it way out in the deep sea.

He let out a long sigh as of labor accomplished.

"Well, take it in. Now listen—"

She repeated her offer slowly. Vern's mind was out in

the garden laying a court of crazy paving in a circle where the tree had been. A sundial or birdbath in the center, stone benches round it. Nobody would ever sit there. But nobody would ever dig there either.

"You're very generous. I hope you won't regret it."

"I won't. It gives me satisfaction to feel that my part of the bargain is fully paid."

"Don't you think you're being a little hard?"

"Not hard enough. Now understand this, Vern, that's *your* house from now on. I will never enter it again. I leave it to you to pack and ship my personal things. But this apartment is mine. Don't ever call here. Soames has instructions to deny you admittance."

In a moment it had become the last place in the world he would ever want to enter.

"Fair enough, Enid. But what about the legal doings? Deeds to the house, divorce and so on?"

"My attorney will need you when these things are all ready. Better come to town tomorrow or the next day. Call me up when you're in a hotel. Oh yes, there's a check in the mail to carry on." Her voice broke again. "Good night, and goodbye to you."

He heard the click of her instrument being hung up. She hadn't even waited for him to thank her or even say goodbye.

He stood with the dead phone in his hand unable to realize that this improbable event had actually happened.

He was free without the horrible risk he had been prepared to pay for freedom. For freedom had no meaning as such without unearned money.

He was safe without the horrible risk that faced him of exhuming and disposing of Lily's body.

He was rich enough to go anywhere he liked, do anything he liked. That was one thing good about Enid. When she said a thing he could count on it as done already.

He was so incredulous and overwhelmed that he did

not even know what he was feeling. A mixture of many things.

Like a pariah for one thing.

He replaced the phone.

He was not an outcast without friends. Old Cap loved and admired him. Eva was waiting for him in the living room. Feeling more grateful to her than he did to Enid, he went back to her.

She smiled at him, tossing back her cloudy hair. Her warm loveliness, her radiant charm were his. She loved him, so she held him in the warm circle of the human race.

"What do wives call about in the small hours? That interests me."

"Divorce."

"*Divorce?*"

"She came round to my way of thinking. She's going to Florida right away. All over but the court proceedings."

He believed it himself as he heard himself say it.

Eva went white and wrung her hands together. "But you didn't tell me you'd asked her."

"Didn't think it any use. Never hoped she'd come round."

"Then how did you mean to—"

"I was going to try something. Charge her with mental cruelty. She gave me plenty."

Eva looked shocked, bewildered, even a little frightened. Not at all as a girl should look who had just got news that happiness lay right ahead.

"It's you and me now," he said, sitting by her. "Aren't you pleased, Eva?"

"Of course, Vern. But I have to get used to it. It's overwhelming. Everything's going too fast for me."

"I'm overwhelmed myself if you want to know the truth."

"I understand," she said sadly. "Even if you want to be free it must be a shock when you come to it. Someone you're used to—there must be *something*."

"There was once, but she killed it. She—" He stopped, throwing out his hands.

"She loved you too much." Eva looked serious and troubled. "They say you kill the thing you love."

"Stop!" shouted Vern.

Eva jumped and burst into tears.

He put his arm round her. "Sorry, darling, I didn't mean to be unkind. I'm nervous. I can't stand any more talk about Enid."

"I'm sorry, too. It's just, well, I feel guilty about her suffering, while I'm so happy."

And she sobbed against his shoulder.

"A strange way of showing it."

But it felt so good to have a warm young body in his arms that he held her closer and closer, laid his cheek on her hair, murmured endearments he didn't know he knew, comforted her forgotten tenderness, unaware he was repeating his grandmother's endearments from his childhood.

Eva wiped her eyes and sat up.

Vern drew her to him and kissed her till he felt passion kindle in her body. He released her when he felt her withdraw from him.

"That's for later," she said in her calm, serious manner. "I want my marriage to be wonderful."

"Eva, will you marry me as soon as it's legal?"

"Yes, I will. I want to. How soon will that be?"

"I don't know. But I'll know very soon. Suppose you drive me to the airport and I'll fly into New York tomorrow?"

"Today, you mean. It's already tomorrow. Darling, I really want to go now."

"I'll take you in the Rolls. This way, darling."

While they sat in the car saying good night, the flames of morning rose from the dark blue rim of the sea.

Flying to New York, Vern had no time for his usual adjustment. Or his harrowing experience and the change

in his condition had temporarily confused him. He felt alien and unable to orient himself in the city.

What New York hotels he had ever stayed in were in the downtown direction near the Village.

At the thought of the Village a long shudder of apprehension went through him. To get as far from it as possible he checked in at a hotel on Central Park South.

Settled in his room he sat on the narrow single bed and made his telephone calls. Soames answered from the apartment. He was icily polite. He returned with the message that Madame had nothing to say, but please leave his telephone number so that when she required him she could call him.

Humiliated almost beyond endurance, Vern gave the address and phone number, adding airily, "And how are you, Soames?"

With a frigid dignity that almost iced the wire, the old man replied, "I don't think it really interests you, Mr. Harrison, so I will return to my duties, if you will excuse me."

Vern slammed down the phone. He was furious to feel that his stomach was fluttering. He picked it up again and asked for room service and ordered some brandy.

He paced the narrow room while waiting for it. Young men, he thought, who envied the "idle" husbands of rich wives should try it sometime. No money was harder earned, or ever would be.

He felt better after a double brandy, warm and relaxed.

Now to call Pellingham. He felt still better. The thought that Eva loved him gave him a pleasantly secure feeling.

Her low, laughing voice was suddenly in the room with him.

"Oh Vern, you have a rival. I'm madly in love with your car."

"That's normal. I'll leave it to you in my will."

"But it will be so *old*."

"That doesn't matter with a Rolls. Now darling, what's new with you? Not that there could be anything."

"But there is. Gramp is playing the heavy parent. He's pleased about us—don't worry about that—but he's got the neighbors on the brain. Nobody here but gulls. Just the same he won't let me go over to your house again till all is over. Unless he's with me. He's up there right now laying the fires or something. He said to tell you please call him there."

"I'll do that, Eva. Do you love me?"

"You know the answer."

"Then why, Eva?"

"I ask myself that question. Guess it's because you're merely wonderful."

The disturbance in him settled. He felt calm and confident.

"Thank you, Eva, darling."

The confidence lasted while the operator rang and rang the beach house. Vern had almost decided to cancel the call when the old man came through, sounding a little breathless.

"I was in the woodshed, Vern. Sorry. Now what's this I hear about you and Eva? I have to get the straight of this. She's my girl and I won't stand for any—"

"Dead slow!" cried Vern. "You're way off course."

He gave his version of the break with Enid to the old man's satisfaction and assured him the visit to New York would take care of getting all the legal proceedings started.

"And about time, Vern. This is one case I wouldn't advise another try. She nearly blew *my* head off this morning!"

"She isn't *there*!"

"Holy Smokes, no. I noted some tiles off the roof over the nor'east corner. So I phoned for a go-ahead for the roofers. She said it was your blasted house and your responsibility."

"That's right, Cap. Thanks. Please get the roofer."

"You mean she gave it ye back?"

"Something like that. Anyway, the deeds will be in my name as from this morning. Anything else—"

But the old man required assurance over and over that the house belonged to Vern and he had sole authority to make domestic decisions. "What is this, Cap? Do I need a whole new roof or something?"

"Oh, no, no. Nothing like that. Cudn't believe the good news is all. Oh, and before you go, one more thing. Do you have a maid in town called Lily Matthews?"

The room seemed to reel, so great was the shock.

Vern was unable to speak. His blood went through him like a whirlpool sucking down his heart.

"Are you there, Vern?" shouted the old man.

"Yes, yes. I was just trying to think." He swallowed and moistened his dry tongue. "Can't remember one. But why do you ask?"

"Just a postcard from the Railway Company saying they found the fur-lined gloves she reported lost on the train."

"Oh!" Vern saw himself in the dresser mirror and his face was white under his tan, his lips were pale and his eyes were staring.

"I'll just readdress that to your wife's address."

"No," said Vern. "Just ignore it."

"But that's inconsiderate," persisted Cap. "A girl like that can't afford to lose—"

"Leave it. I'll be back in a few days. I'll take care of it."

The exasperation in his tone had the wrong effect.

"That wouldn't be some girl friend, Vern? Now would it? Ye're like a son to me, but there's one means more. That's Eva. Nobody's ever going to hurt my Eva."

Vern drew a deep long breath, steadying himself by painful will power.

"That girl has no existence for me, Cap, whoever she is. I swear it by all I hold holy."

"First I knew you held anything holy, and no need to swear. I'll take yer word."

Vern was afraid to go further on the disposition of the postcard and so make an important issue of it. After a few more assurances that Eva's fate was in good hands, the old man was satisfied and hung up.

Vern had now lost the calm and confidence that Eva's approval of him had given him.

And he had lost the desire ever to go back to Pellingham.

Heat flowed over him in anger against Lily.

The damn fool, leaving her gloves in the train. Then giving *his* address to the station clerk in a place where he was well known.

He paced his room again, pressing his fists against his head. Trying to think ahead, squarely and clearly.

It would be better if he didn't go back to Eva.

Old Cap's affection for her with its fierce protectiveness was an element he hadn't reckoned on.

The moment his temper flared into a quarrel with Eva, there would be no hope of a normal settlement. Her meddling grandfather would be on the track of the elusive Lily Matthews.

Vern groaned and drank some more brandy.

Or was he magnifying this thing because of its significance?

The name meant nothing to the old man. Probably he had already forgotten it. But it was an easy name to remember. Lily Matthews. It had a sing-song rhythm that clung to the mind. Lily Matthews.

He stood still and looked out the window.

Spring was a faint green veil over Central Park. Shouts came up from children at play. Faintly he heard a lion roar. He hated the place. How banal it was. Why not stick around till the settlement was drawn up and he had some money in the bank, then take off for South America?

The Chilean coast, Valparaiso, the Andes. Also he had always liked Guatemala.

There were women everywhere. He did not need Eva.

There were no other calls to make. He couldn't sit in

a hotel room all day. But where to go? What to do? He wasn't going anywhere where he'd meet Enid's friends. Nor could he go anywhere where someone might tap him on the shoulder and say, "Have you seen Lily lately?"

His heart began to thud and his apprehensive skin tingled.

It was maddening to have nothing to do, to belong nowhere.

He couldn't even sit in any of the pleasant little bars he knew and drink in peace. Suddenly he might begin talking.

The room was too small to be endured. It was the size and shape of a family vault.

He was conscious of an aching nostalgia for the big, bright living room at Pellingham with its wide window full of dunes and sea. Its barrel roof with the great beams. The great fieldstone fireplace full of aromatic flames.

His Steinway piano.

But when he had his money he could buy himself such a living room anywhere in the world.

That house wouldn't be the same anymore. Lily had spoiled it.

His stomach dropped and the electricity of terror spread all over his body from his solar plexus.

He would have to go back to remove Lily's body.

For if he decided to go abroad and forget the whole thing, he would never be safe anywhere while it lay in the garden, not even with a cement swimming pool over it.

With an exclamation of rage, he picked up his hat and went out.

He went over to Aeolian Hall and found a music room rentable for study. He took it by the day.

For about twenty minutes he forgot his miseries in a weeping minor melody.

Then his fingers began to trip as they gathered speed.

He stopped and sat looking at them. The knuckles were still thick at the joints and the bones had a bruised

feeling. His hands were ruined. Perhaps they would never be entirely right again.

No wonder musicians insured their hands. He smiled wryly.

It might be a little difficult to collect if they ruined their hands by burying a body.

But the music calmed him. He dined at an unfamiliar and unfashionable restaurant, seeing nobody he knew. Afterwards he went to a foreign cinema showing a psychological French drama starring Jean Gabin. He slept through it.

He could have slept there all night, but he was wide awake when he got to bed in the hotel.

The night crawled like a dying snake. His mind raced out of control anticipating a thousand incidents that might lead to torture. Eternity passed and yielded another morning.

He was taking coffee in his room when the telephone rang. Enid's attorney invited him to call at the office on Wall Street, answer some questions and sign some documents.

Vern's nerves shrank from the humiliation of the encounter, but his head welcomed it.

It was less of an ordeal than he had anticipated.

The attorney and his clerk were not friendly, but neither were they hostile. They were competent, thorough and impersonal.

Vern received the deeds to the Pellingham house.

He listened to the terms read to him under which he agreed to accept the settlement. He signed a waiver to any further claim on Enid either in her lifetime or on her estate after death. He received a check for \$833.33, his first monthly check from the trust, payable in advance.

Not exactly riches, considering what she has, he thought as he folded it into his wallet.

"Am I free to return to Pellingham?" he inquired.

"Unless you can get back in a hurry on call," was the

reply, "we'd like you to stay another couple of days. Some details in connection with the divorce proceedings."

He decided to wait.

The night was made bearable by a long chat with Eva on the telephone.

"Stay," she advised, "and get everything over—"

"You sound as if you want me to stay away." He was disappointed with her eagerness.

She laughed. "Maybe I do. Maybe we're planning—"

But the phone was snatched from her, and Cap came on the wire. "Women can't keep a secret," he said testily. "Let's know when to meet ye at the airport."

Eva waiting for him at the airport with the big Rolls.

Vern's star was beginning to rise. It paid to be unsentimental, uncompromising.

He got little sleep again, but his mind was calmer. His future was now secure. He smoked, musing on all the things he had to look forward to. Certainly not on the childish surprise Cap and Eva were evidently planning for him, some sort of party no doubt.

He wished he had the foresight to pack some of Enid's sleeping pills. He thought of the little bottle he had last seen in the kitchen.

The kitchen reminded him of Lily.

He thought of her now with a difference. Had he submitted to her ridiculous demands he would now be ruined, instead of in his present agreeable situation.

Finally he fell asleep.

Cap answered the telephone when he phoned Thursday morning to tell Eva when to meet him at the airport.

"She's out right now, shopping at the store," said Cap, in a strange, husky voice. "You'll be met. What time's your plane landin'?"

Vern told him, and while he told him he was pierced with an eerie stab of intuition.

"Anything wrong, Cap?"

“What could be wrong, Vern?”

“Nothing, nothing. Your voice. I can’t explain it.”

“Same as always,” said the old man. “I’ll be seein’ ye, Vern.”

He realized what it was later when it was too late. The old man’s voice wasn’t friendly.

He was met at the airport, but not by the Rolls. A waiting police car moved up to the steps as the plane let the passengers out.

Vern saw old Captain Piers get out of it with three men in uniform.

Seemingly unable to speak, he pointed at Vern and then turned away from him.

Vern’s ears roared as if he fell through space into a bottomless abyss.

He shook the impertinence of a hand from his arm.

“What is this outrage?”

Old Cap summoned his courage. “Go quietly with them, Vern. Co-operate. The tree surgeons found something ghastly when they broke the ground this mornin’ to replace your tree.”

He was spinning in a black void and was hardly conscious that his mind was working.

“Replace my tree! Who in God’s name gave anyone authority to trespass on my ground?”

The old man’s mouth was shaking. “Eva thought now it was your own house, it ’ud be such a wunnerful surprise for you.”

The hand was back on his arm impelling him quietly to the car. It would be his own fault if opposition attracted attention from the outgoing passengers.

He moved with them round him, hemming him in.

Captain Piers hung back. Now that his job of Judas was accomplished, he wasn’t going with them. Like a shot in the arm, Vern was revived by a hot, black surge of venomous hatred.

“You goddam meddling old fool!” he shouted over his shoulder.

The old man brushed his gnarled old hand over his tears.

Sergeant Mallet raked Vern with hard, contemptuous, grey eyes. "He was your good friend, Mr. Harrison. He insisted someone must have used the house in your absence, that he knew you couldn't have done it."

"Done what?" Vern had the presence of mind to ask.

"Murdered the young woman whose body was buried in your garden and who has been identified as Lily Matthews."

It was too great a shock. His presence of mind was gone. Instead of expressing horror and amazement, he announced himself guilty.

"Old Cap was right. I've never even heard of the woman. I don't like your attitude. And I don't see why we can't go to my house where I will be glad to answer all your questions."

"The homicide men are in possession of your house, Mr. Harrison."

Vern was shocked speechless. His desperate mind flitted over the house trying to recall anything he had forgotten. He could think of nothing. The house was bare of clues. If it hadn't been for that stupidity of losing her gloves, they would never have known of Lily Matthews.

Thank whatever powers might be, no one had seen him with her nor could link him definitely as a visitor to her apartment. She had kept her place washed and polished, not a repository of forgotten finger prints.

He sank back in the car watching the gulls wheel in the pellucid light.

He was numb. He was incredulous. He was in a frightful nightmare.

Where now was his research on methods the police used to crack homicide cases? There was ordeal by exhaustion.

Oh, yes, they warned you that anything you said would be taken down and used in evidence against you. But they went on asking.

So be it. He would be as shrewd as they were, and he was inured to lack of sleep.

There was no point in answering questions with any other answer than one: "I know nothing about it."

It was their job, if they could, to prove him guilty.

He retreated into contemptuous silence.

On account of the prominence of Enid's family, the report of the body discovered in the beach-house garden and the coroner's inquest made headlines in Boston and New York.

Captain Piers reluctantly identified the sailcloth as a piece he had given Mr. Harrison, but to the best of his knowledge it was available to any beachcomber since Vern kept it in the boathouse.

He gave evidence, too, that he found the postcard addressed to Lily Matthews in the mailbox, that he had inquired for a forwarding address and that Mr. Harrison had denied knowledge of her.

He admitted that he had supplied the gruesome curios and material which had been utilized as a murder weapon.

Medical and police evidence further influenced the coroner's jury to return a verdict of "first degree murder by Vern Harrison."

Like a trapped animal he waited for the trial that would set him free in the jail at the back of the City Hall in Pellingham.

For of course he knew they would have to set him free.

Any other conclusion to this humiliating exhibition, this searing exposure of his private life, was absolutely unthinkable.

Their assumption on such slender evidence that he was the murderer was unjust and presumptuous.

Enid neither visited nor communicated with him, but she engaged the famous criminal lawyer, Willard Markham, to defend him.

Vern received his first visit with outraged fury.

"I am innocent. The truth is self-evident. So why should I need a lawyer?"

Massive as a Saint Bernard dog, the great man looked at him with gentle curiosity.

He spoke mildly. "Your wife thinks you do, young man. She gave instructions no time, effort or expense must be spared to defend you adequately."

Vern was astonished. "Then she believes I am innocent?"

Again the bland, penetrating gaze. "She hopes I can get you a verdict of not guilty."

Vern felt his tormented head would burst with the sudden pressure of passion.

"She is delighted I am in this goddammed awful spot. Trapped, mortified, disgraced. Now the saint bends to aid the sinner. Right where she wants me. She doesn't believe in me."

Mr. Markham was no more moved by this outburst than he would have been in a courtroom.

"Come now, Mr. Harrison, you're being childish. Your wife exerted great powers of persuasion on me to take the case. I don't particularly care for it."

"Nor for me either."

"I didn't say so."

"Well, I hate my wife as much as she hates me. It's her fault I'm in this predicament."

"That might be a good line of questioning to open up the search for a defense. Where do you figure she fits into this picture?"

Vern's haggard face flooded with color. He got hold of his temper.

"Her intolerant attitude toward my music drove me to the beach house out of season when it was normally closed for the winter. Otherwise this question wouldn't have arisen. I would have had my alibi."

The lawyer said so softly that Vern barely heard it:

"And perhaps the murder wouldn't have happened either."

“If you think I’m guilty, what possible use are you?”

“None at all, unless you confide in me. Suppose you tell me your side of the story. Also any theories you may have as to why this happened in your house.”

“I told you I don’t want a lawyer.”

“As you wish,” said Willard Markham, picking up his briefcase. “They will force one on you at the trial if you are not prepared, and he will be inferior in experience and ability.”

“Very well,” said Vern wearily, “I’ll talk.”

The lawyer led him gently when he faltered with another innocuous question.

Vern ended. “You see how little there is to tell.”

“But you have not told me everything.”

“You are entitled to your opinion.”

“I’m on your side, remember.”

“Then what more can I do about it, Mr. Markham?”

“Confide in me. Don’t let the prosecution floor me with surprises.”

“Such as?”

“Evidence placing you in the girl’s home in New York. Anything that might indicate when and where you knew her.”

“I told you I didn’t.”

“I am not at all sure I would be intelligent to take the case.”

“I swear that I’m innocent!” Vern exploded in anger.

Captain Piers made one visit while Vern awaited trial. He was not encouraged to make a second one.

“Eva wanted to come, Vern, but I overruled her. ’Twud make it look bad for you if the story you were courtin’ got about. Praise be, it didn’t.”

“It was nice of her to think of it,” he said coldly. He was unable to resist adding, “Considering she’s responsible for this gruesome experience.”

“Vern, ye wudn’t be sayin’ ye’d want—”

“No. But I should have been sent for before the police.

It was my land. No right to tamper with it in the first place. Had I been called to take care of the situation the moment you discovered something wrong, an entirely different complexion would have been on the matter."

Deeply troubled, the old man said, "I'm as sorry as can be. And Eva told me to tell you don't worry, justice will be done. She believes in you."

Vern struggled to speak, suffocated with hate.

"Thank her for nothing. That goes for both of you."

The old man sighed, shrugged his shoulders and asked the guard to let him out.

Vern received no communication from Enid.

He was convinced that she now knew, or guessed, what was the origin of his strange behavior when she arrived unexpectedly at the house.

What she thought didn't matter. She would never tell anyone such a suspicion, and a wife cannot be called to testify against her husband.

There was nothing but circumstantial evidence against him, lacking a motive, and the defense was building a strong case for the possible off-season unauthorized occupation of the house.

The autopsy had established that Lily was pregnant, but without evidence that Vern had ever known her it was a secondary matter.

He spent the sleepless hours of night raking her New York apartment for traces he might have left, but except for fingerprints he finally concluded there was nothing he had left there.

He gave a lot of thought to the fingerprints. There would be none left on china or glasses. And it was very unlikely there would be any anywhere else. Lily liked things clean and shiny. A nice girl if she hadn't been stupid.

He began to long for the trial so that he could get these torments of suspense settled and out of his mind.

Lily had prophesied he would become famous. Too bad she'd never know she'd been a true prophet.

The trial attracted more visitors than Pellingham could accommodate. The reporters' benches were jammed with talent from the big city newspapers. His story would be by-lined by famous names.

Vern stared defiantly at his audience from the dock.

He knew how the martyrs must have felt when the barbarians showered arrows or pelted stones at them.

Cased in the armor of his pride he studied their faces, the self-righteous, the sensation-hungry, the dour old Cape Codders in the jury box, the society visitors from Boston and New York avid to watch his torture in the name of justice.

Implacably he hated them all.

Their superiority, their righteousness, their security.

He would not break before them and give them their barbaric satisfaction.

He listened with apparent detachment to the tedious medical and technical evidence, growing more and more confident that the Markham genius would raise too much doubt in the minds of the jury for them to be sure he was connected with the crime.

If there was any doubt at all, they would acquit him.

He knew that rigid Cape Cod conscience.

They would despise him no doubt for the way he made his living, but they wouldn't condemn him for doing away with a girl he had never seen, let alone never known.

On the third day of the trial the prosecution produced his little red book.

The homicide team had found it on the piano.

The shock froze him, making him appear impassive and unconcerned.

The note he had written under Eva's he explained was a joke. If not, would he leave it on the piano for her to pick up and go on from there?

Markham made much of its evidence that Vern had

been away from the house and immediately before him his wife had been with him.

Ironically they made nothing of the scoring "for and against" which had condemned Enid to death.

It was a game he played for himself, he explained, a form of gambling like solitaire.

They argued a great deal. He scored against her when he won the argument.

Late on the next day the prosecution produced its sensation.

For this was his real book of doom.

It was a sketch book of pencil drawings found in Lily's apartment in the drawer in her bedside table.

There were thirteen drawings and Vern was the only subject. They had been done from memory, but each was a tour de force of characterization. Lily's talent had been extended far beyond its limits by the aching need of her love.

The likenesses from every angle were so powerful and unmistakable that the supporting evidence of Lily's meticulous rendering of a printed silk tie was unnecessary. However, the modernistic tie spattered with musical instruments and symbols was passed round the jury for comparison.

The prosecutor read the captions under the drawings.

The first ones were "Harry Vern," then "my darling," then "darling Vern."

Vern withered where he stood.

Someone in the crowd snickered, starting a wave of derisive laughter. The judge banged his gavel and threatened to clear the court. He saw Eva get up and go out.

That was the moment Vern Harrison died.

What they electrocuted was a somnambular body.

In semi-trance he apologized to Willard Markham for holding back vital information.

The lawyer was indifferent. "You didn't fool me, Harrison. Nothing could have saved you. I took the case because I was sorry for your wife.

"No need for that now. This will make her happy," said Vern. "She predicted a bad end and she likes to be right."

A look of utter unbelief crossed Willard Markham's face.

"I think not, Harrison. Your wife took an overdose of sleeping pills last night. She died this morning without being aware of the result of the case."

Then he said goodbye to the condemned man.

* * * * *

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